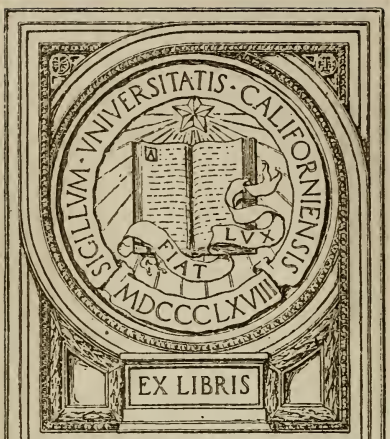

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A REVIEW OF HAMLET

MACBETH — A FRAGMENT

By George Henry Miles

Said the Rose, and Other Lyrics

Christine, and Other Poems

Mohammed

Essay on Hamlet

Loretto; or, The Choice. A Novel

The Truce of God. A Novel

The Governess. A Novel

GEORGE HENRY MILES

A REVIEW

OF

HAMLET

BY

GEORGE HENRY MILES

Late Professor of Literature in Mount St. Mary's College, Maryland

NEW EDITION

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PREFACE

THIS "Review of Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet" was first published in 1870. Much attention was attracted to it because of the striking point of view from which it is written and its entirely novel and original interpretation of the character of Hamlet. Edwin Booth, the great actor, wrote a letter thanking Miles for this interpretation, which he adopted, and they became good friends. A great English critic has lately said of this Review: "But what strikes us most in the essay is, not only the intensity of the critic's sympathetic appreciation of the poet's work, but his penetrative insight into its essence. Whatever may be thought of its main thesis and of some of its minor contentions, no more vigorous, subtle, and original contribution to American Shakespearian criticism has ever been made."

Miles was especially adapted to the work of dramatic criticism, for he was himself a practised writer and dramatist. At the age of twenty-four he had written a tragedy, "Mohammed," which, against a hundred competitors, had gained the prize of one thousand dollars that was offered by Edwin Forrest, the great actor and philanthropist, for the best tragedy in five acts by an American writer. Five years later his tragedy of "De Soto" was produced by James E. Murdock, an eminent tragedian, and was performed in nearly all parts of the United States. After some years more of literary work in writing plays, novels, and poems, Miles accepted the Professorship of English Literature at the University of Mount St. Mary's, Maryland.

The Review was originally intended as a lecture to be delivered by Edwin Forrest, and was afterwards amplified and published by the author in book form. He meant it to be used also as a text-book

for advanced students in English Literature. As he himself says in writing to a friend distinguished as an educator, to whom he had sent a copy of "Hamlet": "An experience of seven years' teaching has convinced me of the value of the masterpieces of the great dramatist as a means of education. It is my intention to follow this essay with others on Macbeth, Lear, Othello, and Henry IV. In my classes I have found that most collegians are easily trained to understand and appreciate the majesty and beauty of the poetry. Even *dull* students, of seventeen years or more, when the finer passages are read to them by a teacher with only a very limited power of elocution, can be aroused to a keen sense of interest in and enjoyment of the dramas and of their marvellous literary merit."

Miles was also of the opinion that these essays would doubtless be welcomed as agreeable text-books by that very large class of people who, either from scruples

of conscience or lack of opportunity, are debarred from seeing and hearing Shakespeare's plays at the theatre. It was while working at this interesting series, and with the Review of Macbeth half finished, that death brushed the pen out of his hands, leaving "Hamlet" as his only finished Shakespearian essay. The fragment on Macbeth has been printed at the end of the book.

I have to thank the Rev. Thomas E. Cox, of St. Basil's Church, Chicago, for valuable assistance and suggestion in the preparation and revision of this volume.

F. B. M.

A REVIEW OF HAMLET

MACBETH — A FRAGMENT

A Review of Hamlet

In all of Shakespeare's finer plays, there is sure to be, at least, one master mind among the characters. (Lear, even in grotesque dilapidation, is a master mind,) Iago is another, Macbeth, or rather his Demon Lady, is another; but the tragedies themselves are far from owing their chief dramatic force and interest to this individual ascendency. In the calm, vindictive envy of Iago, in the rage and desolation of Lear, in the remorse of Macbeth, passion or plot is the governing motive of interest; but there is never a storm in Hamlet over which the 'noble and most sovereign reason' of the young prince is not as visibly dominant as the rainbow, the crowning grace and glory of the scene. Richard is the mind nearest Hamlet in scope and power; but it is the jubilant

wickedness, the transcendent dash and courage of the last Plantagenet that rivet his hold on an audience; whereas, the most salient phase of Hamlet's character is his superb intellectual superiority to all comers, even to his most dangerous assailant, madness. The fundamental charm of *Hamlet* is its amazing eloquence; its thoughts are vaster than deeds, its eloquence mightier than action. The tragedy, in its most imposing aspect, is a series of intellectual encounters. The Crusader of Ashby de la Zouche, engaging all the challengers, is not more picturesque than this Desdichado of Denmark consecutively overthrowing every antagonist, from Polonius in the Castle to Laertes in the grave.

But the difficulty of *representing* this! The enormous difficulty of achieving a true tragic success, less by the passions and trials than by the pure intellectual splendor of the hero! The almost superhuman task of imparting intensest dramatic

interest to a long war of words — for the part of Hamlet is well nigh twice the length of any other on the stage — the almost superhuman power whereby the prince, instead of degenerating into a mere senior wrangler, is so exalted by the witchery of speech, that the lit brow of the young academician for once outshines the warrior's crest, for once compels a more than equal homage from the masses!

Perhaps Shakespeare never asked himself the question, never precisely recognized the difficulty. But, as the vision of the unwritten Drama loomed vaguely before him, he must have been conscious of a summons to put forth all his strength. With a central figure of such subtle spirituality, with a plot subordinating action to eloquence, or rather substituting eloquence for action, the great dramatist instinctively employed a Saracenic richness and variety of detail. The structure of *Macbeth* is Egyptian, massive as the pyramids, or

Thebes; of *Othello*, unadorned, symmetrical, classic; of *Lear*, wild, unequal, fantastic, straggling as a Druid Grove; but *Hamlet* resembles some limitless Gothic Cathedral with its banners and effigies, its glooms and floods of stained light, and echoes of unending dirges. I never read 'Act I. Scene 1. *Elsinore. A platform before the Castle. Francisco at his post. Enter to him Bernardo,*' without, somehow, beholding the myriad-minded poet at his desk, pale, peaceful, conscientious, yet pausing as in the Stratford bust, with lips apart, and pen and eye awhile uplifted, as organists pause that silence may settle into a deeper hush, — the longest pause at such a moment that Shakespeare ever made. But though not embarrassed by its difficulties, he must surely have been awed by the immensity of his undertaking. For the fundamental idea of the tragedy is not only essentially non-dramatic, but peculiarly liable to misinterpretation; since any marked predominance of the intellectual

over the animal nature is constantly mistaken for weakness.

The difference between a strong man and a weak one, though indefinable, is infinite. The prevalent view of Hamlet is, that he is weak. We hear him spoken of as the gentle prince, the doomed prince, the meditative prince, but never as the strong prince, the great prince, the terrible prince. He is commonly regarded as more of a dreamer than a doer; something of a railer at destiny; a blighted, morbid existence, unequal either to forgiveness or revenge; delaying action till action is of no use, and dying the victim of mere circumstance and accident. The exquisite metaphor of Goethe's about the oak tree and the vase predestined for a rose, crystallizes and perpetuates both the critical and the popular estimate of Hamlet. The Wilhelm Meister view is, practically, the only view; a hero without a plan, pushed on by events alone, endowed more properly with sentiments than with

a character, — in a word, *weak*. But the Hamlet of the critics and the Hamlet of Shakespeare are two different persons. A close review of the play will show that Hamlet is strong, not weak, — that the basis of his character is *strength*, illimitable strength. There is not an act or an utterance of his, from first to last, which is not a manifestation of power. Slow, cautious, capricious, he may sometimes be, or seem to be; but always strong, always large-souled, always resistless.

The care, the awe, with which Shakespeare approached his work, are visible in the opening scene. You cannot advance three lines without feeling that the poet is before you in all his majesty, armed for some vast achievement, winged for the empyrean. In all that solemn guard relief, there is not a word too much or too little. How calm and sad it is! sadness prefiguring the unearthly theme, — grand syncopated minor chords, — the Adagio of the overture to Don Giovanni! The super-

human is instantly foreshadowed, and hardly foreshadowed before revealed. The dreaded twice-seen sight is scarcely mentioned. Bernardo has just begun his story, —

> Last night of all
> When yon same star that 's westward from the pole
> Had made his course to illume that part of Heaven
> Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
> The bell then beating one, —

when, without farther prelude, the sepulchral key-note of the plot is struck, and enter Ghost, dumb, majestic, terrible, defiant, and, above all, *rapid*. An honest ghost, a punctual ghost; no lagging Rawhead and Bloody-bones, expected indefinitely from curfew to cock-crow. Mark the pains with which this magnificent apparition is gradually got up; observe how crisply and minutely the actor is instructed to *dress* the part. First the broad outlines:

—— that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march,—
—— the very armor he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated;
So frown'd he once, when in an angry parle
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.

The second touches are more precise and vivid.

Ham. Arm'd, say you?
Mar., *Bern.* Arm'd, my Lord.
Ham. From top to toe?
Mar., *Bern.* My lord from head to foot.
Ham. Then saw you not his face?
Hor. O yes, my lord, he wore his beaver up.
Ham. What, looked he frowningly?
Hor. A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.
Ham. Pale or red?
Hor. Nay, very pale.
Ham. And fixed his eyes upon you?
Hor. Most constantly.

* * * * * *

Ham. Stayed it long?

Hor. While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

Mar., *Bern.* Longer, longer.

Hor. Not when I saw it.

Ham. His beard was grizzled? no!

Hor. It was as I have seen it in his life,
A sable silver'd.

No misconception now, my heavy friend who plays the ghost; no room for speculation in the wardrobe now. You cannot go wrong if you would. 'Armed from top to toe,' 'his beaver up,' 'frowning,' but the eyebrows not *too* bushy, for the frown is more in sorrow than in anger. Not a particle of rouge, but pale, very pale; nor any rolling of the eyes, sir, either, but a fixed gaze. The very pace at which you are to move is measured: count a hundred as you make your martial stalk and vanish. The delineation is Pre-Raphaelite, even to that last consummate touch, the sable silvered beard. It seems easy, this slow portraiture of a Phantom, just as all perfectly executed feats seem easy; but

it is painting the rainbow. And lest this honest Ghost should become *too* human, with one wave of the wand it is rendered not only unearthly, but impalpable.

Hor. Stop it, Marcellus!
Mar. Shall I strike it with my partisan?
Hor. Do if it will not stand.
Bern. 'T is here!
Hor. 'T is here!
Mar. 'T is gone. (*Exit Ghost*)
We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence;
For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

Manlike, magnificent, yet ghastly too, — for our blood is made to curdle by that start at cock-crow.

Ber. It was about to speak when the cock crew.
Hor. And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons.

What a dark, weird whisper! How it goes home to the popular heart, — all that awful majesty crouching at cock-crow!

And when the picture is thus marvellously finished, observe how lovingly it is framed in gold:

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm:
So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

Where, save by the pencil of the Paraclete, has such divine use been made of the music of the bird 'that is the trumpet to the morn!'

There is a loving care, a sedulous finish, about the whole portraiture, assuring us that Shakespeare wrote the part for himself. We know that he acted it, and that it was 'the top of his performance.' What a treat to have seen him! Better even than listening to Homer chanting his fiery epics. Perhaps the poet dared

not trust his Ghost to other hands; for the fate of the whole tragedy hinges upon the masterly rendering of this perilous part. Although Burbage, and other players of the Blackfriars were more popular general actors, yet the elaborate impersonation of a departed soul differs, almost as much as its conception, from the coarser eloquence and action by which mortal passions and emotions are counterfeited. That awful monotone, that statuesque repose with which the Ghost still walks the stage, are probably a reminiscence of him who gave such immortal advice to the Players, and who first acted 'the Ghost in his own Hamlet.' But more than this. Aubrey had heard that Shakespeare was 'a handsome, well-shaped man;' the Stratford Bust and the engraving by Martin Dreeshout confirm the tradition. Connecting this tradition with our positive knowledge, that, not withstanding his invincible modesty and propriety, he ventured to undertake a part

which, although predestined for himself, he scrupled not, in obedience to the compulsion of the plot, to consecrate for all time as the supreme type and model of manly beauty, may we not be permitted to associate his likeness, in some measure at least, with that of the majesty of buried Denmark?

See what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man.

But prompt as the apparition is to come, it is slow to speak. That it means to speak, we know; that it means to make some fearful unfolding, we feel; but it remains deaf and dumb to all Horatio's pleading, — more terrible, more significant, more obstinately mute than the Proph-

etess in the Agamemnon. This superb visitant, so carefully, so cunningly constructed, is not to be fathomed or unriddled at sight. It does not pay its first visit to Hamlet and blurt out all at once, as a vulgar, unauthenicated phantom would have done. We are allowed first to hear of it; then to steal a glimpse of it; then to watch it 'while one with moderate haste may tell a hundred.' But just when expectation is kindled to the highest pitch, the scene shifts, and we are consigned by Horatio

> Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
> This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.

Not only is the interest heightened by this wise suspense, but it is artistically essential to the perfect intelligibility and effect of the Ghost's long revelation that we should have some antecedent acquaintance with the guilty King and his infatuated Queen. And not less important that we should behold this same young Hamlet and his attitude at Court before the advent of the

superhuman — a Hamlet uninfluenced by anything more terrible than his father's sudden death and mother's sudden marriage, yet most profoundly influenced by that double woe. How briefly, yet how completely, this is done.

King. But now my cousin Hamlet and my son, —

Ham. A little more than kin and less than kind. (*Aside.*)

King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Ham. Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.

Notice the first keen flashes of this noble and most sovereign reason sparkling in its own gloom like polished jet. Disarmed at the first pass that uncle-father. Nor does the Queen fare better.

Queen. Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.

Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:
Thou know'st 't is common — all that
live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.
Ham. Ay, madam; it is common.

Her maternal platitudes are shivered by the easy scorn of his reply. But this resolute woman, then undergoing perhaps her first experience in being silenced, answers very much to the purpose:

If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?
Ham. Seems, madam! —

It is like 'the flash and motion' of Geraint. No more questionings, but '*we pray you*,' '*we beseech you*,' ''*t is sweet and commendable in your nature*,' 'let not thy mother lose her prayers,' 'be as ourself in Denmark.' And *he?* — he is hardly listening: he will, in all his best, obey them: he will stay at home and *not go back to school at Wittenberg*. For let it not be forgotten,

that this superb intelligence, whose career has charmed and perplexed mankind for three centuries, was not too old to go 'back to school in Wittenberg.' This immaturity should be carefully remembered in the estimate of his character. A Collegian, even of thirty, summoned by the visible ghost of a murdered sire from love and life and the fair orchards of ripening manhood, to revenge and ruin, may exhibit much hesitancy and vacillation, without being tainted with inherent infirmity of purpose.

That wondrous first soliloquy is the simultaneous presentation of a plot and of a character, — of all the tragic antecedents of the Play, and of Hamlet struggling through the gloom, the incarnation of eloquent despair.

O, that this too — too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God!
O God!

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world! &c.

Is this a sample of the imputed 'wavering melancholy and soft lamenting?' Since the Psalms of David, and the still deeper pathos of the Passion, where has mental agony found such awful utterance? Nor is the final line, —

But break, my heart, — for I must hold my tongue!

any evidence of weakness. For what *could* the man say? The throne was not hereditary; his mother was mistress of her own hand; he had no proof, not even a fixed suspicion, of foul play. His tongue was sealed until the coming of the Ghost.

It is manifest from the King's speech at the opening of the second scene, that the royal pair are then giving their *first* audience of state. Cornelius and Voltimond are dispatched to Norway; the suit of Laertes is heard and granted; and Hamlet, *who was not to be trusted abroad*,

forbidden to return to Wittenberg. Most assuredly, it is Hamlet's first public reappearance. Since his father's funeral, he has lived in the strictest seclusion, or he could not else be ignorant of Horatio's presence in Elsinore. It may be as well to remember this; for the play is so elliptical, that one is apt to marvel why the two friends have not sooner met. Some hint of Hamlet's having been summoned to Court to be publicly warned from re-entering the University, must have leaked out, or we should scarcely have Marcellus saying —

> And I this morning know
> Where we shall find him most conveniently.

Horatio respected the Prince's privacy until forced by love and duty to invade it. But he could scarcely have been prepared for the sad change in his schoolmate. He, as well as Ophelia, had only known him as

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;

The expectancy and Rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observ'd of all observers.

With too much reason, Hamlet had lost all trust in his mother; and when we cease to trust our mothers, we cease to trust humanity. Hamlet belonged to that middle circle of the Sons of Light, who become cynics, instead of villains, in adversity. Characters of perfect sincerity, of exhaustless tenderness, of ready trust, when once deceived by the few that were dearest, become irrevocably mistrustful of all. Your commonplace neighbor who knows himself a sham, accepts, perhaps prefers, a society of shams; has no idea of being very true to anybody, or of anybody's being very true to him; leads a sham life and dies a sham death, — as near as the latter achievement is possible, — leaving a set of sham mourners behind him. But the heart whose perfect insight is blinded only by its perfect love, once fooled in its tenderest faith,

must be either saint or cynic; must belong either to God or to doubt forevermore. A blighted gentleness is as savage in the expression of its scorn as your born misanthropist or your natural villain; save that the hatred of the one is for vice, and cant, and cunning, of the other for credulity and virtue; save that the last is cruel in word and deed, the first in word alone.

Yet Hamlet is less a cynic than a satirist, and less a satirist than a Nemesis. Though merciless in plucking the mask from a knave, a villain, or a fool, yet the dormant tenderness which underlies his character, flashes fitfully out through his interviews with his mother, Laertes and Polonius, as well as being steadily manifest in his unquestioning trust in Horatio after their *reunion*. For such a thorough political change has overshadowed Denmark, that their meeting is rather a spiritual reunion than an interview. By the inexorable logic of events, Hamlet is ranged *against* the throne, the conspicuous

head and front of a moral opposition, an inevitable, though passive, rebel. If Horatio is *loyal*, no matter what their previous friendship, they are thenceforth foes. One must have lived through civil war to appreciate the dexterous nicety with which Hamlet feels his former friend. And yet this early association of excessive mistrust with excessive morbidity, inclines us to suspect that the subsequent shock of the Ghost was rather an arrest of the slow degeneration of fixed melancholy into madness, than an aggravation of antecedent lunacy.

(*Enter* HORATIO, MARCELLUS, *and* BERNARDO.)

Hor. Hail to your lordship.

Ham. I am glad to see you:
Horatio, — or I do forget myself.

Hor. The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

Ham. Sir, my good friend, — I 'll change that name with you:
And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio? —
Marcellus?

Mar. My good lord —

Ham. I am very glad to see you. — Good even, Sir. —
But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

Hor. A truant disposition good my lord.

Ham. I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence,
To make it truster of your own report
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.
But what is your affair in Elsinore?

For the third time. And see the dark hinting in the next line at the royal 'rouse' and 'wassail;' at the orgies of the scandalous wedding — as if Horatio might possibly have come to share *them*.

We 'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

Horatio instantly detects and answers the inuendo.

My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

Ham. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.
Hor. *Indeed, my lord, it follow'd hard upon.*

Even this little, from a man like Horatio, is enough; they are on the same side, rebels both. Quick as lightning the glance is given and returned; he can trust Marcellus and Bernardo too, and bares his heart to them with a fierce sigh of relief.

Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.
Would I had met my dearest foe in Heaven
Ere ever I had seen that day, Horatio.
My father, — methinks I see my father.
Hor. O where, my lord?
Ham. In my mind's eye, Horatio.
Hor. I saw him once; he was a goodly King.
Ham. He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.

This brief introduction to the main theme is inimitable. How exquisitely the ear is made to long for Horatio's blunt transition:

My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.
Ham. Saw! who?
Hor. My lord, the King, your father.
Ham. The King, my father!
Hor. Season your admiration for awhile
With an attent ear, till I may deliver,
Upon the witness of these gentlemen,
This marvel to you.

Instead of being unnerved by the story, the Prince is calm, collected, determined; cautious, reticent, and longing for night. He dismisses them with the stately courtesy which distinguishes him throughout the play; enjoining silence and promising to share their watch betwixt eleven and twelve.

Once more on the Platform before the Castle, the poet's verse resumes the awful minor in which his tragic preludes are so often conceived.

(*Enter* HAMLET, HORATIO, *and* MARCELLUS.)

Ham. The air bites shrewdly ; it is very cold.
Hor. It is a nipping and an eager air.
Ham. What hour now ?
Hor. I think it lacks of twelve.
Mar. No, it is struck.
Hor. Indeed ? I heard it not : then it draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

(*A flourish of trumpets, and ordnance shot off within.*)

What does this mean, my lord ?
Ham. The King doth wake to-night, and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels ;
And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
This kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.
Hor. Is it a custom ?
Ham. Ay, marry is it :
But to my mind, — though I am native here,

> And to the manner born—it is a custom
> More honoured in the breach than the
> observance.

We have quoted the whole scene up to this point, because just here occurs the first serious conflict between the Quarto of 1604 and the Folio. The twenty-two lines that follow in the modern text on the authority of the Quarto, are wanting in the Folio. As the Folio afterward omits nearly the whole Fourth Scene of the Fourth Act; and as the larger omission involves almost essentially the character of Hamlet himself, we propose to inquire in advance whether these large omissions on the part of the Folio are deliberate or accidental.

'Previous to the publication of the Folio edition of Shakespeare's dramatic works in 1623, under the auspices of his fellow-actors, Heminge and Condell,' says Mr. Dyce in his Preface, 'seventeen of his plays had appeared in Quarto at various dates. The Folio of 1623 in-

cludes, with the exception of Pericles, the plays which had previously appeared in quarto, and twenty others, which till then had remained in manuscript. Though these quartos — the Hamlet of 1604 amongst them — found their way to the press *without either the consent of the author or of the managers*, it is certain that nearly all of them were printed, with more or less correctness and completeness, from transcripts of the theatre.' It must be conceded, that the Quarto of 1604 is especially correct; but still the original, or *standard*, from which it was taken, remained, of course, in the hands of Heminge and Condell, who represented the management. Now, it cannot be doubted, that Heminge and Condell *must* have been *perfectly familiar* with a 'stolen and surreptitious copy' published right under their eyes in Fleet street, at the very time they were acting the Play. They must not only have been conversant with a copy which they specifically denounce, but, as old

'fellows of the Blackfriars,' they must have had the true version at their fingers' ends. So that if the Folio fail to reproduce a conspicuous passage of length contained in a previous Quarto, the fairest inference would seem to be, that the passage is either spurious or subsequently condemned and erased by their associate Shakespeare himself, or at his instance. For it is inconceivable that two friends and fellow-actors of Shakespeare's *honorably distinguished in his will*, however guilty of minor inaccuracies, could have been so inconceivably negligent as to overlook, or so unconscientious as to suppress, without the author's warrant, any genuine, accepted, standard, salient portion of a leading part — least of all, the leading part of Hamlet. The temptation was all the other way — to expansion, not contraction. The title page of the Quarto of 1604 professes to give the play 'enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie.' The editors of the

Folio were quite as anxious to exhibit the writings of their departed friend, 'cured and perfect of their limbs' and 'absolute in their numbers.' Even the 'unexampled carelessness' of Blount, the supposed supervisor of the press copy 'handed over to him by Heminge and Condell,' *dared* not wilfully ignore a striking scene made still more memorable by a long Soliloquy. The twenty-two lines in question, as well as the scene in the Fourth Act, although introduced at the earlier rehearsals, must therefore have been silenced in the standard copy. And by the *standard* copy, we mean the acting copy matured under Shakespeare's own eye, and consecrated by his final *imprimatur*. At all events, the stolen Quarto of 1604 cannot possibly dictate the final aspect of a drama whose author lived *twelve years* after its first surreptitious publication. We must look to the Folio for the latest phase of Shakespeare's manuscripts; and, faulty as it may be in

minor matters, we cannot but regard a significant and palpably deliberate omission conclusive against the Quarto, in the absence of direct proof, or the very strongest intrinsic evidence to the contrary.

But in the case before us, and in the vastly more important omission in the Fourth Act, the intrinsic evidence sustains the Folio. After

> — it is a custom
> More honoured in the breach than the observance,

the following lines are omitted in the Folio:

> This heavy-headed revel east and west
> Makes us traduc'd and tax'd of other nations:
> They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
> Soil our addition; and, indeed, it takes
> From our achievements, though perform'd at height,
> The pith and marrow of our attribute.

So, oft it chances in particular men,
That, for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth (wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,)
By their o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason;
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausive manners; — that these men —
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature's livery or fortune's star, —
Their virtues else, (be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo)
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault: the dram of eale
Doth all the noble substance often doubt
To his own scandal.

—— 'The dram of *ill*
Doth all the noble substance *throw* in doubt,'

seems to be the *meaning* of the line.

Possibly the passage is genuine: an overflow of Shakespeare's boundless wealth of thought and imagery. But it is asking too much, even of Hamlet, to moralize

at such length at such a moment. Moralizing to such little purpose, too, in a feeble disquisition that soon degenerates from parenthetical confusion into hopeless bewilderment. It may indeed be urged in support of the disquisition, that it prolongs the suspense; that it gives the three watchers better opportunities of action; that Hamlet does not expect to be listened to, in fact, is not half listening to himself, — and hence, in the gradual entanglement of the discourse, we have only another miracle of Shakespeare's genius; that, all the while, Horatio and Marcellus can be glancing back into the midnight for the ghostly confirmation of their story; that Hamlet himself, with eye aslant, dimly perceived the coming apparition while stammering out that impotent conclusion; that Horatio's '*Look, my lord, it comes!*' besides being the rhythmical complement of '*To his own scandal,*' is too bald and abrupt, and cannot directly follow '*More honoured in the breach than the observ-*

ance,' without violating the very soul of verse.

But strong as this plea is for the passage, there is a stronger one against it: it is *weak*. Not, by any means, that the youth who could so calmly moralize at such a crisis is weak, but that the disquisition itself, good as it may be, is not good enough for Hamlet — that the staple thought is not up to the mark of that divine intellect; that it gives an undue preponderance to the meditative element in that complicated character; that it begets a vague impression of feebleness at variance with the radical conception of the part; that it is clearly unequal to the rest of the scene, and a blot on the magnificent sphere of thought and action by which it is followed: that, although permitting a little side play, which could have been better attained, were it worth while, by a brief hurried dialogue, it darkens the coming splendor, and hovers like a pall over that radiant afterflash —

Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!—

In fact there is almost an intrinsic certainty that the poet cut out the passage *without perfectly reuniting the broken thread.* And the wonder is, not that this small neglect should occur — not that in the development of a character so intricate, so refined, so subtle, an incongruity should arise, — but that one or two bold erasures should leave the portraiture symmetrical and complete.

In reply to Hamlet's invocation, the Ghost merely beckons. Grand, deathless words — much fearful, passionate striving must ensue before the mighty phantom is permitted to speak.

Hor. It beckons you to go away with it,
As if it some impartment did desire
To you alone.
Mar. Look, with what courteous action
It waves you to a more removed ground;
But do not go with it.
Hor. No, by no means.

Ham. It will not speak; then will I follow it.
Hor. Do not, my lord.
Ham. Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?

How the two soldiers at his side — how even the beckoning majesty of buried Denmark — are dwarfed by this sublime challenge flashed from the living to the dead.

Ham. It waves me still. —
Go on; I'll follow thee.
Mar. You shall not go, my lord.
Ham. Hold off your hands.
Hor. Be rul'd; you shall not go.
Ham. My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
(*Ghost beckons.*)
Still am I call'd; unhand me, gentlemen, — (*Breaking from them.*)
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me: —
I say, away! — Go on; I'll follow thee.

The friendly grasp is paralyzed less by an exertion of the Nemean lion's nerve than by the superhuman fitness and intellectual glare of the threat. It is a spiritual thunderbolt.

The scene shifts. Deeper gloom, deeper horror: a place to put toys of desperation into every brain. Once more the Ghost — Hamlet following, haggard, breathless: young life taxed to the uttermost in its proud grapple with the walking grave; matchless intellect well nigh strained to utter overthrow by the terrors of this phantom chase; that voiceless, armèd spirit, the still, unpeopled midnight, and the doomed boy of Wittenberg!

After such profound elaboration and suspense, the great difficulty, now that the Ghost *must* speak, is to find adequate words for him; to make his language as effective and unearthly as his bearing; to give him voice without damaging or destroying the illusion. This is so perfectly managed,

however, that the spectre, instead of losing in effect, becomes still more spectral by its long revelation. The instant the figure advances into broader light, the background deepens into darker mystery.

Ham. Where wilt thou lead me? Speak; I'll go no further.
Ghost. Mark me.
Ham. I will.
Ghost. My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.
Ham. Alas, poor ghost!
Ghost. Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.
Ham. Speak; I am bound to hear.
Ghost. So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.
—— But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood,

Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from
their spheres;
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine,
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood.

Observe with what oracular antithesis the climax of the story is put:

But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

Observe the sepulchral iteration:

List, list, O, list!

and again, —

Revenge his foul and most unnatural
murder.

Ham. Murder!

Ghost. Murder most foul, as in the best it is:
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

and again, —

O horrible! O horrible! most horrible!

and still again,—

> Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.

Observe, too, how, just when the language mellows into mortal music, and the phantom threatens to become too intensely human, the torchlight of the supernatural comes slanting in:

> O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!
> From me whose love was of the dignity,
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage; and to decline
> Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
> To those of mine.
> But virtue, as it never will be mov'd,
> Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven;
> So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
> Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
> And prey on garbage.
> But soft! methinks I scent the morning air.

And still more exquisitely, —

> Fare thee well at once!
> The glow-worm shows the matin to be near
> And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.

Observe, too, — and this is the most wonderful feature in all this wonderful business, — how true the spirit keeps to both its past and its present existence; how doubly faithful to the world and to the grave:

> No reckoning made, but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
> Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damned incest.
> But, howsoever thou pursu'st this act,
> Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught: leave *her* to heaven,

> And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
> To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once.

How piteous, this chivalrous tenderness clinging even in the tomb to a lost, worthless idol!

Amidst all the emotions with which Hamlet is simultaneously overwhelmed by the interview, the first to assert itself definitely is pity. One brief appeal to heaven, earth, and hell, — one call on heart and sinews to bear him stiffly up, — then pity, pure and profound. And, at such a moment, the capacity to pity reveals an almost infinite strength.

> Remember thee!
> Ay, *thou poor ghost*, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe — Remember thee!
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I 'll wipe away all trivial fond records
> That youth and observation copied there;
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmixed with baser matter; yes, by heaven.

Up to this point nothing can be saner. But just here, for a single second, his 'distracted' brain gives way, as the vision of the 'smiling, damnéd villain' replaces that of the vanished ghost.

O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damnéd villain.
My tables, — meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:
(*Writing.*)
So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;
It is, "Adieu, adieu! remember me:"
I have sworn 't.

Whatever may be thought of the words, the *action* — that doomed figure, crouching over its tables in the dim midnight, — is a flash of positive madness, brief as lightning, but as terrible too. In this moment of supreme trial, his mind gives way: the remainder of the act is a struggle to restore the lost equilibrium. And in all the annals of tragedy, there is nothing half so frightful as this tremendous conflict of a godlike

reason battling for its throne against Titanic terror and despair. Lear is comparatively an easy victim. The transition from senility to dotage, from dotage to frenzy, owing to its milder contrasts cannot be as appalling as the sharp conflict between mind in its morning splendor, and the hurricane eclipse of sudden lunacy. The first soliloquy revealed a predisposition to madness; but here the man actually goes mad before our eyes — just as Lear goes mad before our eyes, save that instead of lapsing into fixed insanity like the old King, Hamlet emerges from the storm, radiant, calm, convalescent, victorious, but with a scar which he carries to his dying day.

But will you call him *weak* because his reason sinks awhile beneath the double pressure of natural anguish and supernatural terror? Was Macbeth weak? Yet, in his own lighted halls, how quite unmanned in folly one glimpse of the blood-boltered Banquo makes him. Not till the horrible shadow is gone, is Macbeth a man

again; not till the questionable shape that makes night hideous departs, does the braver soul of Hamlet betray its exhaustion; and then only after a long sigh of pity! Was Richard weak? Yet in the milder midnight of his tent, how 'the cold, fearful drops stand on his trembling flesh,' before those phantoms of a dream.

> By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night
> Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard,
> Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
> Arméd in proof, and led by shallow Richmond.

Yet the shapes that awed those men of steel were but coinage of the brain; unreal mockeries, all; while Hamlet confronts, and confronts unappalled, a well-authenticated ghost — a ghost as visible to Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo, as to himself. Nor should his comparative sinlessness affect our estimate of their relative courage. The walking ghost of a murdered king, fresh from the glare of penal fires, swearing an only son to vengeance, must be

quite as trying to the soul of innocence, as the chimeras of remorse to the nerves of guilt. If Hamlet's reason is momentarily dethroned, it is only to reassert its supremacy — only to pass triumphantly through the ordeal of delirious reaction. For that moment of madness has its sure sequel of delirium, — a delirium that could only have flowed from an antecedent moment of madness. The exhibition of this delirium is the crowning achievement of the Act, of the Play, — of all dramatic art. See how he staggers back with 'wild and whirling words' from the perilous edges of madness; see how dexterously, yet grotesquely, he baffles the pardonable curiosity of his companions; see how he jests and laughs over the sepulchral '*Swear!*' of the fellow in the cellarage, lest sheer horror should compel his friends to divulge their ghastly secret.

Hor. My lord, my lord, —
Mar. Lord Hamlet, —
Hor. (*Within.*) Heaven secure him!

Mar. (*Within.*) So be it!
Hor. (*Within.*) Illo, ho, ho, my lord!
Ham. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come.

Enter HORATIO *and* MARCELLUS.

Mar. How is 't my noble lord?
Hor. What news, my lord?
Ham. O wonderful!
Hor. Good my lord, tell it.
Ham. No; you 'll reveal it.
Hor. Not I, my lord, by heaven.
Mar. Nor I, my lord.
Ham. How say you, then; would heart of man once think it?
But you 'll be secret.
Hor. Mar. Ay, by heaven, my lord.
Ham. There 's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark
But he 's an arrant knave.
Hor. There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
To tell us this.
Ham. Why right; you are i' the right;
And so, without more circumstance at all,
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:

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But he 's an arrant knave.
Hor. There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
To tell us this.
Ham. Why right; you are i' the right;
And so, without more circumstance at all,
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:

You, as your business and desire shall point you,
For every man has business and desire,
Such as it is : and for mine own poor part,
Look you, I 'll go pray.

Hor. These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

Ham. I 'm sorry they offend you, heartily ;
Yes, faith, heartily.

Hor. There 's no offence, my lord.

Ham. Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, *that* let me tell you :
For your desire to know what is between us,
O'ermaster 't as you may. And now, good friends,
As you are friends, scholars and soldiers,
Give me one poor request.

Hor. What is 't, my lord ? We will.

Ham. Never make known what you have seen to-night.

Hor. Mar. My lord, we will not.
Ham. Nay, but swear 't.
Hor. In faith,
My lord, not I.
Mar. Nor I, my lord, in faith.
Ham. Upon my sword.
Mar. We have sworn, my lord,
already.
Ham. Indeed upon my sword, indeed.
Ghost. (*Beneath.*) Swear!
Ham. Ah, ha, boy! say'st thou so? art thou
there, truepenny,
Come on, — you hear this fellow in the
cellarage. —
Consent to swear.
Hor. Propose the oath, my lord.
Ham. Never to speak of this that you have seen,
Swear by my sword.
Ghost. (*Beneath.*) Swear.
Ham. *Hic et ubique?* then we 'll shift our
ground. —
Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword.
Never to speak of this that you have
heard,
Swear by my sword.

Ghost. (*Beneath.*) Swear.

Ham. Well said, old Mole! canst work i' the earth so fast? —
A worthy pioneer! — Once more remove, good friends.

Hor. O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

Ham. And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
But come: —
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself, —
As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on, —
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
With arms encumbered thus, or this head-shake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,

As "Well, well, we know": or "We could an if we would";
Or "If we list to speak"; or "There be, an if they might";
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught of me: — this not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you.
Swear.

Ghost. (*Beneath.*) Swear.

There is a purpose in all this minute precaution. One unwary syllable, one indiscreet hint of the apparition, and instead of becoming an avenger, the chances are that he will become a victim. As for *now* sweeping to revenge on wings as swift as meditation, or the thoughts of love, it is simply absurd. His mission is too vast and complicated to be solved in one fiery second; his life is no longer merely consecrated to woe, but summoned to a perilous and unwelcome *duty*. That grim, ocular demonstration of the existence of penal

fires, has clogged the impulse of human revenge with a salutary appreciation of eternal justice. The future is vague and hopeless, but, come what may, he means to be master of the situation. His manner must necessarily change, but he will mask the change with madness — an easy mask for one whose whole life is spent in holding real madness at bay, — whose reason would be lost in dark abysses of despair, but for the quenchless truth and splendor of an imagination which encircles and upholds him like an outstretched angel's wing. As if that one instant of aberration were providentially suggestive, 'he plays,' as Coleridge observes, 'that subtle trick of pretending to act the lunatic only when he is very near being what he pretends to act.' It is not the past, but a clear vision of the future, that extorts that prophetic sigh.

The time is out of joint; O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right.

The inspiration of that sigh is Ophelia; for, as we shall see, the gloom of that first soliloquy is not without its solitary ray of light.

Now mark with what consummate art it happens, that on the very eve of that fearful midnight,—precisely as Hamlet is about to undergo the most appalling ordeal that ever man sustained, the tragic muse foreshadows another crowning sorrow for the doomed scion of Denmark. The fair Ophelia is made to flit before us, graceful, reticent, tender,—saying the very word that's wanted and nothing more; witty, high-bred, resolute—just such a lady as such a prince might love,

—'whose worth
Stood challenger on mount of all the age
For her perfections:'

a 'Rose of May' that turned

'to favour and to prettiness'
'Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself.'

What a *lady* she is! How archly she turns the tables on her light-headed, loud-mouthed brother, in words as memorable as any in the play:

> But good my brother,
> Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
> Show *me* the steep and thorny way to heaven;
> Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
> Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
> And recks not his own read.
>
> *Laer.* O fear me not,
> I stay too long.

Too long, decidedly; that home-thrust was sharper than the sword of Saladin. But observe how differently she encounters her father; though infinitely more insulted and nettled by the broad sarcasms of the Premier, she never permits herself to be stirred an inch from maidenly dignity, or to violate the completest filial respect and obedience.

Pol. What is 't Ophelia, he (*Laertes*) hath said to you?

Oph. So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

Pol. Marry, well bethought:
'T is told me, he hath *very* oft of late
Given private time to you; and you yourself
Have of our audience been most free and bounteous;

* * * * * *

What is between you? give me up the truth.

Oph. He hath, my lord, of late, made many tenders
Of his affection for me.

Pol. Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his tenders as you call them!—

Oph. I do not know my lord what I should think.

Pol. Marry, I 'll teach you; think yourself a baby;

That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;
Or —— you 'll tender me a fool.

Oph. My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable fashion.

Pol. Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

Oph. And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

Pol. Ay, springes to catch woodcocks —
— From this time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence;
Set your entreatments at a higher rate —
Than a command to parley. ——
—— *This is for all.*
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment's leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to 't, I charge you: come your ways.

Oph. *I shall obey*, my lord.

Observe that it is of *late* he hath given private time to her ; of *late* he hath made many tenders of his affection ; so that in spite of the first soliloquy, in spite of his wish to return to Wittenberg, it may fairly be inferred that elastic youth was striving to repair its first great sorrow, with its first great love,—that the '*O cursed spite!*' is not the lament of a laggard, but of a lover. And, as he proudly rallies from the agonies of that eventful midnight, asserting a quiet mastery, not only over his two friends, but over the impatient Ghost, our hearts bleed for him, as we think of the blow that Polonius is stealthily preparing.

So much has been said about the vacillation and procrastination of this much misrepresented Prince, that one would suppose the action of the Play consumed a year or two. Let us endeavor to fix the extent of his loitering.

The First Act occupies exactly twenty-four hours. The interval between the

First and Second Acts is less easily determined. Hamlet himself is scarcely an authority as to time; his indignant rhetoric openly disclaims fidelity to arithmetic. First, his father had been '*two* months dead' when his mother re-married, then '*not two*,' then '*within* a month,' 'a little month—' and finally less than 'two hours.' But the reiteration of the same numeral is something; and Ophelia lets us know, in the Third Act, that it is then just 'TWICE *two months*' since the regicide. So, allowing a *two* months' widowhood to the Queen, and counting some weeks or days between the second marriage and the first appearance of the spectre, we have less than two months, as the interval between the Acts and the measure of Hamlet's delay — the only delay with which he can be rationally reproached, since after the killing of Polonius he was a State prisoner.

The First and Second Acts, however, are so inseparably linked in horror by Ophelia's terrible picture of her interview

with her discarded lover, that it is difficult to escape the impression that Hamlet stalked straight from the haunted platform into her chamber.

Pol. How now, Ophelia! What 's the matter?
Oph. Alas, my lord, I have been so affrighted!
Pol. With what, i' the name of God?
Oph. My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber,
Lord Hamlet, — with his doublet all unbrac'd, —
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd and down-gyvéd to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been looséd out from hell
To speak of horrors, — he comes before me.
Pol. Mad for thy love?
Oph. My lord, I do not know;
But truly I do fear it.
Pol. What said he?
Oph. He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;

> And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
> He falls to such perusal of my face
> As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
> At last, — a little shaking of mine arm,
> And thrice his head thus waving up and down, —
> He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound
> That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
> And end his being: that done, he lets me go
> And, with his head over his shoulders turn'd,
> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes,
> For out o' doors he went without their help,
> And, to the last, bended their light on me.

We are not permitted to see Hamlet in this 'ecstacy of love.' But what a picture! What vivid detail! What awful light and shade! How he must have loved her, that love should bring him to such a pass? his knees knocking each other? — knees that had firmly followed a beckoning ghost, now scarce able to bear him to his Mistress'

chamber! There is more than the love of forty thousand brothers in that hard grasp of the wrist — in that long gaze at arms' length — in the force that *might*, but *will* not, draw her nearer! And never a word from this king of words! His *first* great silence — the *second* is death! They may meet again — meet a thousand times — meet to-morrow, or next day, or the day after; but with the open grave of their dead love between them forevermore!

The cause of this despair is palpable:

Pol. What! have you given him any hard words of late?

Oph. No, my good lord; but, as you did command,
I *did repel* his *letters* and *denied*
His access to me.

So that in the interval between those acts, he has sought her *more* than once; she has repelled his *letters* — plural. Yet he could only have sought her to whisper some sad parting, for he knew that he was

doomed! Perhaps he may have dreamed of finding counsel in her eyes — of resting that tormented forehead for the last time on her knees! Instead of this, the doors are closed against him! Dismissed, forsaken, just as the glance of a fond woman's eye, the touch of a true woman's hand, was most needed! Was it not enough to madden him? Was it not enough to turn him mercilessly against the sly old trimmer whose finger he detected in the transaction — whom he must always have detested as his uncle's Premier, had he not been Ophelia's father? Would he have been mortal, would he have been a lover, had he not hated Polonius? And yet when they next meet, we are startled by the savage flash of a scorn, for which we are unprepared only because the grand Master has not deigned to re-state the provocation.

This is one of the most amusing of Hamlet's engagements. How confidently the veteran sails into action! —

Pol. At such a time I 'll loose my daughter to him:
Be you and I behind an arras then;
Mark the encounter; if he love her not,
And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a farm and carters.

King. We will try it.

Queen. But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

Pol. Away, I do beseech you, both away:
I 'll board him presently: — O, give me leave.

(*Exeunt King, Queen and Attendants.*)

Enter HAMLET *reading.*

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

Ham. Well, God-a-mercy.

Pol. Do you know me, my lord?

Ham. Excellent, excellent well; you are a fishmonger.

Pol. Not I, my lord.

Ham. Then I would you were so honest a man.

Pol. Honest, my lord!

Ham. Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

This is pitiless. But there is nothing so insufferable to a lofty and morbidly acute intelligence in its prime, as the devices of a wily, aggressive old age — the 'slyness blinking through the watery eye of superannuation.' Yet, with all his drivel, the ancient diplomat is no despicable antagonist: he is still an overmatch for most men. Though on a false trail now, there is no telling when he may strike the true one. He is 'too *busy*,' and that alone is 'some danger.' Still, we could hardly forgive the grim delight with which Hamlet lashes the bewildered and discomfited politician, were it not for that triple wail, 'except my life, except my life, except my life!' This arrests our sympathy just as it is about to side with Polonius, by reminding us of the insignificance of the pain the prince inflicts when weighed against the torture he endures. The Premier's advance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to cover his own retreat, is exceedingly humorous.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

Pol. You go to seek the Lord Hamlet; *there* he is:—[accented just as if he had said,

You go to seek the devil; *there he is!*]—

(*Exit* POLONIUS.)

Through Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Hamlet is presented to us under his subtlest intellectual aspects. These two young gentlemen have been summoned to Court, and delicately commissioned to 'draw out' Hamlet, and gather the secret cause of his affliction; in consideration whereof they are to receive such thanks *as fits a King's remembrance.* They had been brought up with him, 'neighbour'd to his youth and humour,' old schoolmates and friends; yet, at the first intimation of their royal master, they cheerfully sink into paid spies. In their very first interview at Court, they display a talent for self-abasement.

Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.
Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.

They are bought up, body and soul, and the Queen says amen to the bargain.

Hamlet, though entirely ignorant of the transaction, is instinctively on his guard, and divines their mission at sight.

The best and most characteristic portion of the scene, one of the finest in the Play, is omitted in the Quarto — another indication, we think, that the Quarto was from an earlier version, and that we must regard the Folio as the standard. For, in this omitted passage, two *essential* points are introduced; namely, Hamlet's total lack of ambition, and the circumstance of his having servants of his own; which latter fact would facilitate his fitting out or engaging a privateer, or negotiating with Fortinbras to intercept his voyage to England — a point to be considered presently.

Guild. Mine honour'd lord.
Ros. My most dear lord.
Ham. My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rozencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?

Very genial in expression; *but instead of giving them his hand*, he institutes a cross-examination.

Ham. —— What 's the matter?

Ros. Nothing, my lord, but that the world 's grown honest.

Ham. Then is doom's-day near: but your news is not true.

The Quarto is silent here; the Folio proceeds, —

Let me question more in particular: What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune that she sends you to prison hither?

Guild. Prison, my lord?

Ham. Denmark 's a prison.

Ros. Then is the world one.

Ham. A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.

Ros. We think not so, my lord.

Ham. Why then 't is none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

Ros. Why then your ambition makes it one; 't is too narrow for your mind.

Ham. O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have had bad dreams.

Guild. Which dreams indeed are ambition; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

Ham. A dream itself is but a shadow.

Ros. Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality, that it is but a shadow's shadow.

Ham. Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretch'd heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we go to the Court? for by my fay, I cannot reason.

Ros., Guild. We 'll wait upon you.

Ham. No such matter: I will not sort you with the rest of my servants; for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended.

How vainly, yet how persistently, they endeavor to convict him of ambition! How

superbly he disclaims! He is King already! King wherever reason may clamber, wherever imagination may soar! Monarch of all the realms of earth, and air, and ocean! Emperor of infinite space! What cares *he* for the crown of Denmark? He never once alludes to its loss, save in that final summing up against his uncle; and then only as an item on the side of 'perfect conscience': —

He that hath ——
Popped in between the election and my hopes.

His insecure, uninfluential, beggared position at Court, is only glanced at in excuse for not being better able to serve his friends: once at the end of the First Act,

And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do to express his love and friending to you
God willing, shall not lack: —

and twice in the scene we are now examining.

Hamlet's reply to Rosencrantz, 'Then

are our beggars bodies,' etc., is far from clear; but it seems to mean, 'Then are our beggars' (*who have no ambition*) 'bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes' (*who having ambition, are therefore nobodies*) 'but the beggars' shadows.'

The Quarto and Folio now proceed in unison. How finely the Prince plucks out the *heart* of their mystery! How they blush, and quail, and stammer, beneath his eye!

Ham. But in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

Ros. To visit *you*, my lord: no other occasion.

Ham. Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you: and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear, a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

Guild. What should we say, my lord?

Ham. Anything — but to the purpose. You *were* sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which

your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know, the good king and queen have sent for you.

Ros. To what end, my lord?

Ham. *That* you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever preserv'd love, and by what more dear a better purposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no?

Ros. What say you? (*To Guildenstern.*)

Ham. Nay then I have an eye of you; (*aside*) if you love me, hold not off.

Guild. My lord, we *were* sent for.

Ham. I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather. I have of late (but wherefore I know not) lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises: and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent can-

opy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in appearance, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintesscence of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither; though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Ros. My lord, there is no such stuff in my thoughts.

Ham. Why did you laugh, then, when I said, Man delights not me?

Ros. To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you: we coted them on the way; and hither are they coming to offer you service.

Ham. He that plays the king shall be welcome;

his majesty shall have tribute of me: the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target: the lover shall not sigh gratis; the humorous man shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled o' the sere; and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for 't. What players are they?

Ros. Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city.

Ham. How chances it they travel? Their residence both in reputation and profit was better, both ways.

Ros. I think their inhibition comes by means of the late innovation.

Ham. Do they hold the same estimation they did, when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

Ros. No, indeed, they are not. . . . . .

Ham. It is not strange; for mine uncle is King of Denmark; and those that would make mowes at him while my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, an hundred ducats a-piece, for his picture in

little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.

(*Flourish of trumpets within.*)

Observe that it is only under protest, and the compulsion of etiquette, that Hamlet finally offers his hand.

Guild. There are the players.

Ham. Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come. The appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony, let me comply with you in this garb, lest my extent to the players, which I tell you, must show fairly outward, should appear more like entertainment than yours. You are welcome, but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

Guild. In what, my dear lord ?

Ham. I am but mad north-northwest: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.

What a fine mixture of scorn and humor, and old academic tenderness ! It suggests

Ivanhoe's raising his lance to De Grantmesnil. He has already practically forgiven them. They are schoolmates again, for the nonce, as he leans between them —'at each ear a hearer,' with his back to Polonius.

Pol. Well be with you, gentlemen.

Ham. Hark you, Guildenstern; and you too, at each ear a hearer. That great baby you see there, is not yet out of his swathing-clouts.

Ros. Haply, he's the second time come to them; for they say an old man is twice a child.

Ham. I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players; mark it. You say right, sir: Monday morning; 't was so, indeed.

Pol. My lord, I have news to tell you.

Ham. My lord, I have news to tell *you*.
When Roscius was an actor at Rome, —

Pol. The actors have come hither, my lord.

Ham. Buz, buz!

Pol. Upon my honour, —

Ham. Then came each actor on his ass, —

Pol. The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited: Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ, and the liberty, these are the only men.

Ham. O Jephthah, Judge of Israel, — what a treasure hadst thou!

Pol. What a treasure had he my lord?

Ham. Why — one fair daughter and no more,
The which he lovèd passing well.

Pol. Still on my daughter. (*Aside.*)

Ham. Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

This ominous insinuation was going a step too far; and a twinge of self-reproach may have prompted the warning to the First Player, 'Follow that lord; *and look you mock him not.*' No unnecessary warning, for that First Player's eye had been on Polonius with malice aforethought ever since the Premier's

'*That's good: mobled queen is good!*'

But all this while Hamlet has been silently planning his Mousetrap.

Ham. Can you play the murder of Gonzago?

First Player. Ay, my lord.

Ham. We 'll ha't *to-morrow night.* You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in 't, could you not?

First Player. Ay, my lord. (*Exit First Player.*)

(*Exeunt Ros. and Guild.*)

Ham. Now I am alone!

With what fierce delight he hails the moment! His fingers are itching for his sword hilt! His rage must have vent, or it will kill him. Maddened by the forced delay, he turns on himself like a scorpion walled with fire.

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this Player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit,

That, from her working, all his visage warm'd;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspéct,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting,
With forms, to his conceit? and all for nothing?
For Hecuba?
What 's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would
he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion,
That I have? He would drown the stage with
tears,
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free;
Confound the ignorant, and amaze, indeed,
The very faculties of ears and eyes.
Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, impregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing. No, not for a King,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by th' nose, gives me th' lie i' th'
throat,
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?

Yet I should take it — for it cannot be,
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter; or, ere this,
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O vengeance!

The instant the fit is over, he despises his frenzy.

Why, what an ass am I? This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must . . . . . .
. . fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion!
Fie upon 't! foh!

It is true, that Hamlet is constitutionally averse to violence; that he is not 'splenitive and rash;' that he 'lacks gall to make oppression bitter;' that his weakness and his melancholy 'have increased his apathy to all things, even to revenge;' that he

habitually exhibits that chronic antipathy to action which accompanies extreme nervous depression. But as for cowardice? — from such cowards defend us heaven! Once roused, he never sets his life at a pin's fee: the 'something dangerous' becomes something terrible. There is not a hero in Shakespeare — Macbeth, with harness on his back, — Lear, with his good, biting falchion, — Othello, with that little arm uplifted, — ay, even Richard, when a thousand hearts are great within his bosom — who would not quail before the Berserker wrath of this Viking's son! — while, in the blaze of his dazzling irony, Falstaff himself would shrivel up into Slender?

But it is time to explain the true causes of Hamlet's delay. He is not merely the heir of a swift revenge but the princely representative of a 'cause and a name,' which must be *reported aright to the unsatisfied.* How could he *then* kill the King without passing for a common cutthroat? Shall the annals of Denmark be allowed

to perpetuate his uncle as a martyr and himself as an assassin? He more than half believed the Ghost's story, and hence his vehement self-accusal; but to proceed to extremities, without corroborate testimony, would have been both a crime and a blunder. *We* want no farther proof: we are initiated spectators, and have full faith in the word of the majestic apparition. But were we called upon to *act* as Hamlet was, we should think twice before we astonished our friends in particular and mankind in general by exterminating a royal uncle at the special private request of the ghost of a defunct Paterfamilias. Whatever may have been Hamlet's shortcomings, he was distinctly not a fool. And it is impossible to conceive any better, swifter or surer way of accomplishing his complicated mission than by that very assumption of lunacy on the one hand, and the expedient of the Interlude on the other. The first would mitigate the verdict of posterity if sudden fury should goad him into pre-

mature assault, as happened once and nearly twice; the second, by startling the King into some word or gesture of self-betrayal, would serve to justify or palliate a more deliberate revenge. Public verification — human testimony to the truth — of that ghostly charge was not to be obtained in a day or an hour. Hamlet seized the very first opportunity that offered: and it required both consummate ingenuity and consummate daring to devise and carry out the expedient. Away with idle *words* and cursing like a scullion!

> About my *brain!* I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play,
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been struck so to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaimed their malefactions;
> For murder, though it have no tongue, *will* speak
> With most miraculous organ. I 'll have these players
> Play something like the murder of my father
> Before mine uncle: I 'll observe his looks;
> I 'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,

I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy
(As he is very potent with such spirits,)
Abuses me to damn me: I 'll have grounds
More relative than this: — the play 's the thing
Wherein I 'll catch the conscience of the king.

But there is a spiritual necessity for retarded instead of precipitate action. That smiling damned villain is a fascination: it would be a mistake to *slay* him out of hand: the joy of one sharp second is nothing to the delight of watching him, day by day, unconsciously moving nearer to his doom. Had the King a thousand lives, to take them one by one were less enjoyment than the revelry of deepening hatred, the luxury of listening to the far music of the forging bolt. Who has not recognized, in some degree, the charm of the suspended claw, or comprehended the stern joy of the lion in his lair? The crimes of this sceptered fratricide are stale: the murdered

man is dust: his widow old in incest: there is no fresh, living horror to clamor for instant retribution. Indeed there is no adequate retribution possible, except such as the soul of the Avenger can find in saturating itself with the spectacle of its victim. The naked fact of killing the King would be poor revenge save as the climax of antecedent torture, — not physical, but mental and spiritual torture. For when mind and heart are outraged, they seek to be avenged in kind. To haunt that guilty court like a spectre; to hang destruction by a hair above the throne; to wean his mother from her low cleaving; to vex the state with turbulent and dangerous lunacy; to make that sleek usurper quail and cower in every conflict; to lash him with unsparing scorn; to foil him at every turn; to sting him to a new crime; to drag him from his throne, a self-convicted felon, and, ultimately, with one crowning sword-thrust to make all even, — this is the nearest approach to *atonement* of which the case is susceptible.

But the impulse of conscience, as well as of nature, was against a precipitate, headlong assault. Hamlet is represented not only as a prince and a man, but as a Christian; and as a Christian he may be pardoned, *even at this day*, for being *partially* influenced by his faith. The manifest Christian duty under the circumstance was forgiveness: there is no such word as revenge in the lexicon of Calvary. Tried by the Christian standard, the very poorest revenge he could take would be to send his own soul helplessly after his sire's just for the sake of shortening the life and accelerating the perdition of one who was pretty sure in due season to damn himself.

The classics have so profoundly paganized our tastes, that our secret wish is, not that he should shut both ears to the vindictive whispers of a *questionable* shape, but that he should finish up the matter like a man and play the executioner with less mouthing. But Hamlet is not '*the passion puppet of fate, but the representative of an*

august will' (*De Quincey*). Free will and conscience both rebel at this dictation of the grave, this super-position of destiny. The soul immortal as *itself* consents to follow the phantom so far, but no farther; and although sorely tempted to aggression, remains virtually defensive to the end, expectant of the mediation of Providence but disdaining the compulsion of destiny.

There 's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we may.

The power referred to is God, not fate. Even before that glance beyond the grave, that verification of penal fire, he respects the 'canon 'gainst self-slaughter.' On meeting the ghost, his first ejaculation is a prayer,

Angels and ministers of grace defend us,

just as afterward in the interview with the Queen,

Save me and hover o'er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards!

The surmise that the spirit he has seen may be the devil, and that the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape, so far from being an overnice after-scruple, is his first misgiving.

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from *heaven* or blasts from *hell*;
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee.

Questionable from the first. And even after his love and pity are fully enlisted, he cannot banish that grim suspicion of diablerie,

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell?

'So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear,' is hardly the language of a soul in Purgatory, the sphere to which the spirit professes to belong. He cannot divest himself of the darker supposal:

He took my father grossly, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands, who knows saw, heav'n?
But, in our circumstance and course of thought
'T is heavy with him.

So that although the fear of *the worst* deepens and intensifies his wrath, he cannot, without more or less misgiving, wholly abandon himself to a revenge prompted, as he says, by *hell* as well as heaven.

It is precisely this influence of faith, and this consequent confusion of purpose, that lends such a deep, uncertain, unfathomable interest to the Play. The human, at its best, is beautiful, as well as the divine; and most especially attractive when enriched with just so much of the divine as enters into the composition of your average Christian. A Christian rarely presents the same harmonious front to fate which the antique not only permitted, but exacted. When the grave is the consummation, the absolute

finale of existence, except as a dim shade, it is comparatively easy to round the heroic evenly and symmetrically up to that margin. But when death is the door to vaster spheres and wider experiences, when this little life is but the prelude to unending futurities of infinite bliss or infinite despair, the deeper faith should find its echo in deeper art. In *Hamlet*, as in *Faust*, more grandly, though less avowedly, the immortal weal or woe of a *human soul* is at stake; and we catch ourselves listening for the spirit voices at the end,

'He is judged!' — 'He is saved!'

It is precisely here that he explains himself in that marvellous monologue which fills the heart of this troubled symphony with an Adagio of calm, infinite, unearthly beauty. From the first, Hamlet neither cared for nor expected to survive his revenge. '*To be or not to be*,' is not a question of suicide, but of *sacrifice*. He must perish with his victim; there is no escape.

He is ready! For his body he recks not; better thaw and resolve itself into a dew. But his mind? Life had still one delight for this 'fellow of Wittenberg' — the inexhaustible splendor of his own *mind*, the glory and majesty of thought, the ecstasy of perfect expression. It was his vocation, his genius, his supreme happiness, to think, to speak, to imagine. He enjoys the play of his sovereign reason, as the horse of the desert enjoys the play of its arching neck and flying mane, — as the eagle enjoys its pinions while fanning the sun, — as all things divinely beautiful enjoy their own manifestations. Love itself, though his nature is exceptionally tender, is but a secondary transport to the rapture of eloquence. What wonder that he clings to the lighted torch of such an intelligence! What wonder that he strives to bear it unextinguished through the whirlwinds that sweep the dark passes between time and eternity! And yet he would gladly surrender this beautiful mind to the quietus

of final and complete extinction : it is only the *distortion* of the dreams that haunt the sleep of death that gives him pause.

To die, — to sleep, —
No more ; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, — 't is a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, — to sleep ; —
To sleep ! perchance to dream : ay, there 's the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

Still less will he force a lawless passage into that

'undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns,'

even for an enterprise of great pith and moment. 'The dread of something after death'

—— puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of,

Thus *conscience* does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

But apart from all these motives and reasons for delay, Hamlet *could afford to wait.* In the first place, he was personally safe in waiting:

'He 's lov'd of the distracted multitude,'

to such an extent that the King dare not 'put the strong law on him:'

—— 'The queen, his mother,
Lives almost by his looks:'——
—— 'the great love the general gender bear him'

is such that the royal arrows,

'Too lightly timber'd for so loud a mind
Would have reverted to the bow again
And not where they were aimed.'

There is a vulgar impression, owing perhaps to the usual insignificance of stage royalty, that the King was constantly at

Hamlet's mercy: whereas, but for Hamlet's personal prowess and popularity, the case must have been exactly the reverse. As it is, he haunts that guilty palace, pacing the lobby *four* hours together: as it *is*, ever since Laertes went into France, he has been in *continual practice with his rapier*. If suddenly assailed, he is sure of a chance to use it — *once* at least. Always on guard, always vigilant, always armed; reckless and irresistible in his wrath; masked by lunacy and shielded by popular and maternal affection, he felt more than a match for the utmost cunning of the King. Young, unadvised, inexperienced; the representative of the better genius of Denmark; with national interests to regard as well as individual wrongs to redress; watched by an intriguing statesman; worried by a brace of friends turned spies; discarded by the lady of his love; bent on the reformation of his mother as well as on the chastisement of her wretched spouse; passive because uncertain whether his mission is from de-

mon or divinity, yet equal to all odds and any emergency; there is no grander figure in fable or history than Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

The Second Act was a lull, after the storm of the First: the Third Act, beginning only one day later, is an uninterrupted procession of events, moving swiftly and sternly on to their terrible consummation. Polonius is setting another snare, and baiting it with Ophelia. Hamlet has been '*sent for*' to 'affront her,' as 't were 'by accident;' Ophelia is 'loosed,' book in hand, to receive him; the King and his minister so bestowed that, 'seeing unseen,' they may frankly judge and gather,

If 't *be* the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

That Ophelia is *not* aware of the lawful espials is distinctly intimated by Polonius himself after the interview: —

How now Ophelia!
You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said;
We heard it all.

The King's speech to the Queen, 'Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,' &c., as well as the Premier's

Gracious, so please you,
We will bestow ourselves,

must therefore be delivered apart, or aside, from Ophelia, who accepts the proposed encounter, simply as an opportunity of reconciliation. But her woman's wit and maiden love suggest a much better apology for the interview, than the old statesman's rather weak invention,

Read on this book;
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness.

Infinitely better her own honest, proud, instinctive action: —

My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longèd to re-deliver;
I pray you now receive them

She ignores their last dumb meeting:

How does your honour for *this many a day?*

And yet, womanlike, although she had repelled his letters and declined his visits without receiving a single provocation or vouchsafing a single explanation, she now immediately assumes the attitude of injured innocence:

Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.

Alas, she knew not with whom she was dealing. The delicious feminine insincerity, which makes a sound man smile in fancied superiority, was gall and wormwood to this morbid lover of truth. The wound she had dealt his soul was mortal; she had silenced the last hope of his heart; and yet she undertakes to invent unkindness on his part to excuse severity on her own! The whole plot flashes on him at once. He sees the two spies behind the

scenes, as plainly as if they stood before him. He sees in *her* only a puppet or a decoy. The tenderness which deepened his voice into richer music when he first perceived her —

> Soft, you now!
> The fair Ophelia. Nymph, in thy orisons
> Be all my sins remembered —

all this is gone; and instead of it, harsh bewildering laughter: — 'Ha, ha! are you honest? Are you fair? — Get thee to a nunnery!' How significant that fierce, sudden question, 'Where 's your father?'

> *Oph.* At home my lord.
> *Ham.* Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in 's own house.

Sure that Polonius is a listener, *and with her connivance*, he cannot help believing her answer, a direct falsehood, — a falsehood that brings down upon her the cruel levity occurring just before the interlude, and that now embitters and corrodes his

passionate but well-considered and well-meant warning.

Oph. O help him, you sweet heavens!

Ham. If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry, — be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery: farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery go, and quickly too, farewell.

Oph. O heavenly powers, restore him!

Ham. I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on 't; it hath made me mad. I say we will have no more marriages; those that are married already, *all but one*, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go!

Harsh as this sounds to us, the madness which he chose to throw into it, and the love which could not help shining through it, prevent its seeming intentionally harsh to *her*.

She laments it as grotesque, insane, lamentable, but not unkind. She is not hurt, but sympathetic; her prayers and fears are for him, not for herself; it is only as a mourner over his supposed mental ruin, that she suffers at all. — His glance, voice, manner, have so qualified his words that she acquits him, on the spot, of the unkindness with which she had previously taxed him. His whole bearing is so mercifully regulated, that her soul is absorbed in pity,

O heavenly powers, restore him! —
O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! —
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstacy: O woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

She is most deject and wretched, but without even a suspicion of being badly

treated. Nor *is* she badly treated. The resentment of neglected love may inflame his dazzling satire, but under the circumstance, 'Get thee to a nunnery' was the best and only advice he could give her. A nunnery was her best and only refuge from the impending storm. Destruction for himself and all else around him; but, for her the cloisters' timely shelter. There is no telling when the fierce wrath may seize him: when he may shake down the pillars of that guilty palace. But not if he can help it, on her fair head shall the ruin fall! Since the grave is opening for *him*, let the Convent open for *her*. Not his, but never another's! O wonderful poet! Could she not guess, had she not some shadowy perception of the jealous, selfish, masculine love, which despite their fell divorce, would wall her from the world, and mark her with the seal of God, to save her from the violation of man?

More appropriately here, than on the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*, might

De Quincey exclaim, 'O mighty poet? thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature; like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hailstorm and thunder; which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in perfect faith, that in them there can be no too much or too little; nothing useless or inert; but that the further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement, where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!'

The King has gained nothing by playing the spy; he detects too much method in his nephew's madness; that wicked parting threat is ringing in his ears, '*All but one* shall live!' His soul is on the rack; restless, apprehensive, overawed. The weaker mind already quails before the stronger; the executioner of the father begins to tremble before the son. —

There 's something in his soul,
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood;
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger; which for to prevent
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down; he shall with speed to England.

But the pliant monster, overruled as usual by his minister, concludes to postpone the threatened banishment until the Queen mother has a chance to be 'round with him,' *after the play*. Meanwhile the play within the play is preparing; and those wooden strollers, who in other hands would have proved clumsy or unmanageable, are here the occasion of a quiet eloquence, more effective than most dramatic action. 'Speak the speech, I pray you,' is a lesson for all time to all humanity.

The facility with which Hamlet counterfeits madness, is strikingly instanced in the sudden transition from his pre-eminently sane discourse with Horatio, to his outrageous behavior before the royal pair

and their attendants. How calm, how measured, those solemn words to his friend, as if designed to anticipate any misconstruction in that quarter. For it sometimes happens we play the madman so very perfectly, that our best friends are precisely those who are the first to pronounce our sanity counterfeit, and our lunacy natural. But what a superb compliment he pays Horatio; how dearly he loves to praise where praise is due, — that rarest human grace:

Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation cop'd withal.
— Dost thou hear?
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath seal'd thee for herself. —
— Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of hearts,
As I do thee. —

This is the friend whom he now commissions to watch the one scene that comes near the circumstance,

Which I have told thee, of my father's death:
I prithee, when thou see'st that act a-foot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle; if his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a *damned* ghost that we have seen;
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face;
And, after, we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming.

Then, as the first notes of the Danish March announce the coming of the King and court, he plunges instantaneously and without effort, into the reckless, impenetrable, frightful levity, that carries him through the scene. King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, are one by one impaled on his savage irony.

King. How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Ham. Excellent, i' faith; of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air, promise-cramm'd; you cannot feed capons so.

King. I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet; these words are not mine.

Ham. No, nor mine, now. — My lord, you play'd once i' the University, you say. *(To Polonius.)*

Pol. That I did, my lord; and was accounted a good actor.

Ham. And what did you enact?

Pol. I did enact Julius Cæsar, I was kill'd i' the Capitol; Brutus killed me. —

Ham. It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. — Be the players ready?

Ros. Ay, my lord, they stay upon your patience.

Queen. Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

Ham. No, good mother, here's metal more attractive.

Pol. O ho! do you mark that? *(To the King.)*

Ham. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?—
(Lying down at Ophelia's feet.)

Oph. You are merry, my lord. * * *

Ham. What should a man do, but be merry? for look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours. —

Oph. Nay, 't is twice two months, my lord. —

Ham. So long? Nay, then, let the devil wear black, for I 'll have a suit of sables. O heavens! died two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there 's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. —

(Hautboys play. The Dumb Show enters.)

Oph. What means this, my lord?

Ham. Marry, this is miching mallecho;[1] it means mischief. —

(Enter Prologue.)

Pro. For us and for our tragedy,
Here stooping to your clemency,
We beg your hearing patiently.

Ham. Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?

Oph. 'T is brief, my lord.

Ham. As woman's love.

What a volume of pathos in that whispered word! his last serious word to her — the sole reproach he ever makes her!

Puppet Queen. Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light — * * *
If once a widow, ever I be wife! —

[1] Probably a corruption of Spanish, "mucho malhecho," i. e., much ill done, or very ill done.

Ham. Madam, how like you this play?

Queen. The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

Ham. O, but she 'll keep her word.

King. Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in 't?

Ham. No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence i' the world.

King. What do you call the play?

Ham. The Mouse-trap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna; Gonzago is the duke's name; his wife, Baptista: you shall see anon; 't is a knavish piece of work; but what of that? Your majesty and we that have free souls; it touches us not; let the galled jade wince, our withers are unrung.

(*Enter Lucianus.*)

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.—

Oph. You are as good as a chorus, my lord.—

(*Lucianus pours poison into the sleeper's ear.*)

Ham. He poisons him i' the garden for 's estate. His name 's Gonzago: the story is extant and written in very choice Italian: You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

Oph. The King rises.

Ham. What frightened with false fire?

Queen. How fares my lord?

Pol. Give o'er the play.

King. Give me some light; away!

All. Lights, lights, lights.

(*Exeunt all except Hamlet and Horatio.*)

Any other poet would have been content to fix the climax of the scene, in the disordered flight of the palsied murderer; but in Shakespeare, it is only a stepping stone to loftier achievements. The rest of the act is a *tour de force*, a torrent of eloquence, passion and power; a stream of intellectual glory. The dramatic workmanship is inimitable. After the signal triumph of this scheme, after this conclusive confirmation of the ghostly tale,

Hamlet abandons himself to the capricious impulse of the moment, as a strong swimmer abandons himself to a current, only to breast it with recovered strength. Whatever is uppermost in his mind, is the first to find expression. Half remembered fragments of verse, whether applicable or not; tumultuous raillery, in which Horatio is swept along, like a leaf in a whirlwind; swift serious questions; sharp yearnings for music; are all blended together, with unparalleled power and truth.

Ham. Why let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalléd play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep;
Thus runs the world away. —
Would not this, Sir, and a forest of feathers (if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me,) with two Provincial Roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, Sir?

Hor. Half a share.

Ham. A whole one, I.

For dost thou know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and now reigns here
A very, very —— peacock.

Hor. You might have rhymed.

Ham. O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Did'st perceive?

Hor. Very well, my lord.

Ham. Upon the talk of poisoning?

Hor. I did very well note him.

Ham. Ah, ha! — Come, some music! come, the recorders!
For if the King like not the comedy,
Why, then, belike, — he likes it not, perdy. —
Come, some music! —

Re-enter ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

The instant he perceives them, his hysterical mirth curdles into deadly scorn. With princely reserve and measured disdain, he beats back their joint attack, trampling alike

on them and on the royalty they represent. This trialogue is one of the most memorable portions of the play. Every speech of Hamlet's has the flash and sweep of an archangel's sword.

Guild. Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

Ham. Sir, a whole history.

Guild. The *King*, Sir, —

Ham. Ay, Sir, what of him?

Guild. Is in his retirement, marvellous distempered.

Ham. With drink, Sir?

Guild. No, my lord, with choler.

Ham. Your wisdom would show itself more richer to signify this to his doctor; for me to put him to his purgation, would perhaps plunge him into more choler.

Guild. Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.

Ham. I 'm tame, sir; — pronounce.

Guild. The Queen, your mother, in most great affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you.

Ham. You are welcome.

Guild. Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother's commandment; if not, your pardon, and my return, shall be the end of my business.

Ham. Sir, I cannot.

Guild. What, my lord?

Ham. Make you a wholesome answer; my wit 's diseased: but, Sir, such answer as I *can* make, you shall command: or rather, as you say, my mother: therefore no more, but to the matter: my mother, you say, —

Guildenstern thus staggered and silenced, Rosencrantz hastens to the rescue.

Ros. Then thus she says; your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.

Ham. O wonderful son that can so astonish a mother! — But is there no sequel, at the heels of this mother's admiration?

Ros. She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.

Ham. We shall obey were she ten times our mother. Have you any further *trade* with us? —

The music for which he has been longing, enters at last, and the recorder's silent pipe is made immortal as the harp of Orpheus.

Ham. Will you play upon this pipe?
Guild. My lord, I cannot.
Ham. I pray you.
Guild. Believe me, I cannot.
Ham. I do beseech you.
Guild. I know no touch of it, my lord. —
Ham. 'T is as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth; and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are stops.
Guild. But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill.
Ham. Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would

> sound me, from my lowest note, to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think that I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

The breach between them is widening; a dead friendship is rapidly developing into an active hatred. Throughout the interview, Hamlet preserves a frozen calm which they can neither penetrate nor disturb, though all the while his blood is boiling. With masterly self-control, he bids Polonius 'God bless you, sir!' little knowing what immediate need there was for such blessing. There is even a pale evanescent tenderness glimmering through that too palpably counterfeit lunacy, as if the Premier's superannuated slyness were a relief, after the baseness of the two adolescent spies.

Pol. My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

Ham. Do you see yonder cloud that 's almost in shape of a camel?

Pol. By the mass, and 't is like a camel, indeed.

Ham. Methinks it is like a weasel.

Pol. It is backed like a weasel.

Ham. Or like a whale.

Pol. Very like a whale.

Ham. Then will I come to my mother by-and by. — They fool me to the top of my bent. — I will come by-and-by. — Leave me, friends.

He has hardly time to hurry them from his presence, before the dark thought underlying all this mirth betrays itself: he is trembling on the verge of matricide.

'T is now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world; *now could I drink hot blood,*
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. —

O heart lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites,—
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals, never, my soul, consent!

In this mood he seeks the Queen's closet, and in this mood encounters the King at prayer. He must have overheard, on his way there, the interview between the King and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; he *must* have witnessed or overheard them 'making love' to their pitiful employment. For scarcely in any other way could he have foreknown the royal determination, which he immediately after refers to.

Ham. I must to England: you know that?
Queen. —— Alack,
I had forgot: 't is so concluded on.

That ominous interlude has not improved the King's repose.

King. I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. —
The terms of our estate may not endure
Hazard so dangerous, as doth hourly grow
Out of his lunacies. —
Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage:
For we will fetters put upon this fear
Which now goes too free-footed.

Ros., Guild. —— We will hasten us —

Remorse, instilled by bodily fear, has driven the drunkard murderer to attempt repentance.

Help, angels, make assay:
Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
(*Retires and kneels.*)

(*Enter Hamlet.*)

Ham. Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I 'll do it; — and so he goes to Heaven;
And so am I revenged; — that would be scanned:

A villain kills my father; and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To Heaven.
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as
flush as May:
And how his audit stands, who knows
save Heaven:
But in our circumstance, and course of
thought,
'T is heavy with him: and am I, then,
revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit, and season'd for his
passage?
No.
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid
hent,
When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage:
At gaming, swearing; or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in it; —
Then trip him, that his heels may kick
at heaven;
And that his soul may be as damn'd and
black
As hell, whereto it goes.

Hazlitt calls this ghastly, livid wrath, 'a refinement in malice, to excuse his own want of resolution.' A shallow plausibility, demolished by that resolute pass through the arras, aimed an instant later, at this same King of shreds and patches! And besides, there is the drama to consider. To kill the King *then*, would have been an anticlimax and the play have been cut short, as it would also had the King, and not Polonius, been behind the arras! In both these instances the plot required that the King should live, but Hamlet showed himself perfectly willing to kill him out of hand if caught eavesdropping.

The main sorrow of the Ghost is the manner of his taking off:

> Cut off even in the blossom of my sin,
> —— sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head.

Hamlet's main sorrow is less his father's sudden death, than eternal doom. Once fully abandoned to the terrible temptation

which besets him, once mad enough to 'dare damnation,' he is not going to sell his soul for a song; not going to kill the King *at his prayers:* he will give measure for measure, eternal doom, for eternal doom. The depths of faith are revealing darker possibilities of revenge; but the whole frightful passage is a fiendish suggestion, vividly presented, rather than deliberately embraced. It is the first wild, natural imprecation of a son *for the first time* SURE that his uncle is the assassin of his father. This bitter *certainty* transforms him for the moment almost into a demon; and though his conscience reasserts its sway, this is clearly the mood in which he afterwards meets his mother. Had the Prince known that the King, far from being truly repentant, was sending him *to his death* in England, he would assuredly have slain the wretch upon the spot and the play would have had a totally different ending. Shakespeare's art avoided the anticlimax in both these situations.

Polonius is playing the eavesdropper once too often: how dexterous, sly, and busy he is: —

Pol. —— Look you, lay home to him:
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with.
And that your grace hath screen'd and stood between
Much heat and him. I'll sconce me even here.
Pray you be round with him.

She *means* to 'be round with him,' to 'lay home to him.' 'I'll warrant you,' she says; 'Fear not *me*.' She is very bold and confident and self-contained. She is used to conquest. Her dominion over both her royal husbands was supreme: the first is true and tender to her, even in that sulphurous prison-house to which her fickle beauty helped to doom him: the second quotes her, though she must then be near fifty, as the central sun round which he circles.

She 's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
That, as the star moves not but in its sphere,
I could not but by her.

She is morally weak, but otherwise strong: fascinated by a brute, but not cognizant of his crime: the slave of one sin, yet the mistress of more than one virtue. The character is not an uncommon one. Her prostitution cannot be sufficiently detested; but there is not the shadow of a ground to suppose her conscious of the fratricide. As often happens with these magnetic unfortunates, her tender-heartedness survives her personal degradation. She has a kind word for everybody, and it flows unaffectedly from her heart: but, once roused, she displays the spirit of an Amazon. When the mutineers overbear the officers and break the doors, she strides between the armed rabble and the craven King, with a flash of the same fierce wrath which her son inherits.

How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!
O this is counter, you false Danish dogs. —

Not easily crushed, this fair, false, haughty matron: — not easily shaken off, with one wave of the lion's mane, like Polonius and Guildenstern. The encounter is stern from the start.

Ham. Now, mother, what 's the matter?
Queen. Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
Ham. Mother, you have my father much offended.
Queen. Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
Ham. Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.
Queen. Why, how now, Hamlet!
Ham. — What 's the matter now?
Queen. Have you forgot me?
Ham. — No, by the rood not so:
You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife;
And — would it were not so! you are my mother.
Queen. Nay, then, I 'll set those to you that *can* speak.

Ham. Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

Queen. What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me!
Help, help, ho!

Pol. (*Behind.*) What, ho! help, help, help!

Ham. How now, a rat? (*Draws.*) Dead for a ducat, dead!
(*Makes a pass through the arras.*)

Pol. (*Behind.*) O, I am slain. (*Falls and dies.*)

Observe three things: the instantaneous assumption of lunacy, the sharp, unhesitating lunge, — the perfect nerve and composure *after* the deed is done. Weak? why, action is even easier than words to this terrible son of the sea-kings.

But the Queen-mother, unsubdued even by this frightful proof of Hamlet's determination to carry his point, is still every inch a Queen.

Queen. O me, what hast thou done?
Ham. — Nay, I know not.
Is it the king?
Queen. O what a rash and bloody deed is this!
Ham. A bloody deed! — almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a King, *and marry with his brother.*
Queen. As kill a King!
Ham. Ay, lady, 't was my word. —

Had she flinched beneath that sudden test, had she faltered beneath the long and searching gaze with which these decisive words were accompanied, he might have slain her in his fury on the spot. There was no escaping that infallible ordeal: guilt or innocence was written unmistakably in her face; and it needs not the weak assurance of the Quarto of 1603 to convince us of her innocence.

Queen. But as I have a soul, I swear by heaven,
I never knew of this most horrid murder.

The stronger assurance is in her face, in her whole behavior. That question and that gaze have satisfied him: his denuncia-

tions are henceforth restricted to her infidelity.

Ham. Leave wringing of hands; peace, sit you down,
And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff;
If damnèd custom have not brazed it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

Queen. What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me?

Ham. Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;
Calls virtue hypocrite; takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there; makes marriage vows
As false as dicer's oaths.

Queen. Ay me, what act
That roars so loud, and thunders in the index?

Ham. Look here upon this picture, and on this.

It requires all the tremendous sequel of the speech, to humble her thoroughly: but beneath the blast of that resistless invective, she melts away at his feet. 'O Hamlet, speak no more!' But his brain and heart are on fire; his words flow like lava, fiercer, faster, hotter, till stayed in mid career by the fancied or real re-appearance of the Ghost. Its *speech* to Hamlet implies its reality; its invisibility to the Queen, its unreality. To the audience, it should be as visible as when it swept the platform before the Castle. Its invisibility to the Queen may be accounted for by supposing a merciful forbearance in the royal spectre and thus ascribing another grace to the proud, tender shade of the buried majesty of Denmark. Indeed, the brief visitation is more like an errand of love than of revenge. After a rapid, causeless admonition, the phantom's sole anxiety centres on the Queen, about whose ultimate fate he is a thousandfold more solicitous than about his victim son's.

Here, as well as earlier in the Play, Hamlet may have felt this ghostly *neglect* — felt the little more of earth than Heaven in this jealous eagerness to cleanse 'the royal bed of Denmark,' of 'luxury and damnèd incest'; — felt, amidst all his vast pity, that his own spirituality, his own welfare, were slighted by this '*negotio in nocte perambulante.*' Nothing short of the jealous impatience of indestructible love could have imputed to Hamlet 'an almost *blunted* purpose,' while Polonius, slain for the King, was still lying in his blood; unless, indeed, the Ghost were singularly ignorant of that unhappy transaction. It was a signally *sharp* purpose that slew the Premier. Hotspur himself, in Hamlet's place, could not well have gone through this terrible scene with more dash, decision, and reckless scorn of consequences, while all that lurid eloquence, all those frozen tears, would be missing! Measureless conjugal love makes the apparition real, and explains its being both invisible

and inaudible to the Queen. Hamlet's heated imagination and filial piety, dormant as to her, could never have invented a speech of such heroic doting. At all events, the reappearance of the Ghost, so far as the audience and the part itself are concerned, is a dramatic necessity. But do not let us allow the impatient reproaches made by a questionable shape to blind us to the fatal vigor of that pass behind the arras.

Hamlet's attitude towards his mother is that of an inspired prophet. He moulds her like wax to his better will by the miraculous energy of his expressions. He labors giant-like to save her 'fighting' soul; reaching down a redeeming hand through the darkness of deep abysses; dragging her half willing, half reluctant, bruised, trembling, bleeding, into the full daylight of God's holy summits.

Ham. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,

That not your trespass, but my madness, speaks;
—— Confess yourself to heaven;
Repent what 's past; avoid what is to come;
—— Forgive me this my virtue:
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg.

Precisely what he himself must do to most of his readers, for not being more bloodthirsty and vindictive. His irony assumes a momentary plaintiveness:

Once more, good night:
And when you are desirous to be blest,
I 'll blessing beg of you.

He can afford to be tender: his barbed invective has apparently exterminated the sin at which it is aimed: shaft has followed shaft, until the air is darkened. But one temptation still survives; and the quiver of this young Apollo is inexhaustible. By a fine climax of sarcasm, intermixed with a grotesque but significant menace, he contrives to diminish the

novel danger to which her infatuation exposes her; namely, the allurements occasioned by the vivid recital of the details of her guilt:

'T were good you let him know;
For who, that 's but a Queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide? who *would* do so?
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house's top:
Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep,
And break your own neck down.

It is terrible to hear a son thus threatening a mother, face to face: but, taken all in all, his bearing is not entirely unwarranted. And this brings us to what is, perhaps, the very deepest problem in the play.

A mission, inaugurated by what may be called a miracle, can hardly fail to furnish its own opportunities. Chance, in Hamlet's case, will be unseen direction. Since his life is manacled to one issue by preter-

natural interposition, let the same dread agency also indicate the manner of arriving at that issue. In the frenzy inspired by the conviction that the Ghost's word is 'true for a thousand pound,' he would have slain the King, had he been sure of thus dealing out eternal as well as temporal ruin. But ever after and before that horrible impulse, he is steadily *on the defensive*. Even that swift pass through the arras is defensive; he does not strike until his own safety has been compromised by his mother's cry for help. From the moment that he has satisfied himself of the Ghost's veracity, he is eager to obey its behests. There is but an hour or two, at most, between the self-betrayal of the King at the interlude, and the killing of Polonius, — a mistake which he regrets rather as a misfortune than as a crime;

> For this same lord
> I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so
> To punish me with this, and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister.

With men of Hamlet's mould, intellectual scorn is as unchangeable as truth itself. And it may be added that his exquisitely truthful nature constantly exhibits a stern unforgivingness of calculated, persistent insincerity and fraud; an unforgivingness which, but for vast, wondrous, inexplicable miracles of mercy, must belong to supreme Truth itself. A deed, a sight, that might well dismay the warrior of a hundred fields, makes no perceptible impression upon the nerves of this premature veteran in woe.

> Indeed, this Counsellor
> Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
> Who was in life a foolish, prating knave.
> Come, Sir, to draw toward an end with you —
> Good night, mother.

Yet beneath this desperate apathy lurks the silent grace of tears. If the Queen may be believed, he is weeping while he speaks.

We do not know by what or whose

authority the Act is made to end here; certainly not by Shakespeare's. The text of the Quarto runs straight on from beginning to end, without numbering a single Act or Scene. The Folio numbers them only so far as the Second Scene of the Second Act. Instead of '*Exeunt* severally,' as the stage direction now stands, it is '*Exit*' in the Quarto, and '*Exit Hamlet, lugging in Polonius*,' in the Folio. In *both*, the Queen remains on the stage; the King enters, and the action proceeds uninterruptedly. The present arrangement not only ruins the Fourth Act, but confuses and enfeebles the whole play. For reasons presently given, we shall review the Third Act to its legitimate conclusion.

True to her vow, the Queen represents Hamlet to the King as

> Mad as the sea and wind when both contend
> Which is the mightier.

And observe how admirably that rapid assumption of lunacy now serves his turn:

He whips his rapier out and cries, 'A rat, a rat!'
And in this brainish apprehension, kills
The unseen good old man.

The King is in a most unroyal panic.

King. —— O heavy deed!
It had been so with *us*, had we been there:
His liberty is full of threats to all;
To you yourself, to us, to every one.
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch
But we will ship him hence. —
—— Ho, Guildenstern! —
Go seek him out. — Come, Gertrude! — come away!
My soul is full of discord and dismay.
(*Exeunt.*)

The next scene is the arrest. Hamlet's unmitigated, open contempt of the inevitable pair, so different from his former constrained courtesy, reassures us that he overheard their pitiful willingness to superintend his exile. Guildenstern was peacefully silenced; but the more inquisi-

tive and less manly Rosencrantz is spurned and abolished, as Geraint's sword would have abolished the angry dwarf.

Ros. What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

Ham. Compounded it with dust, whereto 't is kin.

Ros. Tell us where 't is, that we may take it thence
And bear it to the chapel.

Ham. Do not believe it.

Ros. Believe what?

Ham. That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. *Besides, to be demanded of a sponge! — what replication should be made, by the son of a King?*

Ros. Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

Ham. Ay, sir; that soaks up the King's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the King best service in the end; he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed; when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

Ros. I understand you not, my lord.

Ham. I am glad of it; a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

Ros. My lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.

Ham. The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body.
The King is a thing —

Guild. A thing, my lord!

Ham. Of nothing; bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after.

That the arrest is a literal military arrest, see a few lines later.

King. But where is he?

Ros. Without, my lord, *guarded*, to know your pleasure.

King. Bring him before us.

Ros. Ho, Guildenstern! bring in my lord.

The haughty questioning of the King is pitilessly demolished by the sublime ferocity of an attack, rapid and resistless as lightning. The spear of Lancelot o'erthrew whate'er it smote: Hamlet's electrical scorn withers and annihilates.

King. Now Hamlet, where 's Polonius!

Ham. At supper.

King. At supper! where?

Ham. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet; we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, — two dishes but to one table: that 's the end.

King. Alas, alas!

Ham. A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

King. What dost thou mean by this?

Ham. Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

King. Where is Polonius?

Ham. In heaven; send hither to see: if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' the other place yourself. But indeed if you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go upstairs into the lobby.

King. Go seek him there. (*To some of the attendants.*)
Ham. He will stay till ye come.
King. Hamlet, this deed must send thee hence
With fiery quickness: therefore prepare thyself;
The bark is ready, and the wind at help,
The associates tend, and everything is bent
For England.
Ham. For England?
King. Ay, Hamlet.
Ham. —— Good.
King. So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.
Ham. *I see a cherub that sees them.* — But come, for England!

Does not this point, in its beautiful way — like a star at sea — toward the pirate of very warlike appointment? But of this hereafter. The King is all aghast:

Follow him at foot; tempt him with speed aboard;
Delay it not; I 'll have him hence to-night:
Away; for everything is sealed and done

That else leans on the affair: pray you, make haste.

(*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*)

And, England, if my love thou hold'st at aught,
(As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red
After the Danish sword, and thy free awe
Pays homage to us,) thou may'st not coldly set
Our Sovereign process; which imports at full,
By letters conjuring to that effect,
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England:
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure: till I know 't is done,
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

(*Exit.*)

All the might of Denmark, and her dependencies arrayed against the exiled Prince! But just then, the martial figure of Fortinbras emerges from the distance and flits by in the foreground. '*Enter Fortinbrasse with his army over the stage: Enter Fortinbrasse, Drumme and Soldiers;*' as the old copies have it. And in this pomp and circumstance of a rival power, we recognize the hope on which Hamlet is silently but securely building. With

this significant array of benignant strength, with this flash of a better fortune for Denmark athwart the deepening drama, the act should end. Ending here, the interval consumed by the voyage to England, the return of Laertes from Paris, and the expedition of Fortinbras to Poland and back, is thrown *between* the Acts, — its natural place. Greek tragedy, restricted by its organic law to the culmination of events, was necessarily an unbroken march from its first chorus to its catastrophe. Modern tragedy aiming rather at the development of character, through a *series* of events, has wisely divided these events into groups separated from each other by the interposition of a curtain. By this brief but total eclipse of the fictitious world, the mind is prepared for intervals of time or space. A year elapsed, or an ocean crossed, during the fall of that mysterious screen, does less violence to the imagination than the supposition of a month between consecutive scenes. In fact, the

fancy is almost as free, save to consequences, at the second rise of the curtain as at the first. We accept Claude Melnotte as a recruit in one act, and a Colonel in the next: but when looking dead into the open heart of a spectacle, we are asked to believe that the Prince who embarked for England under our eyes, is back again in five minutes, after a sea fight, and a week's cruise, the imagination rebels. The proposed extension of the Third Act, would make this greatest of tragedies the most symmetrical too; while the Fourth Act, relieved of a confusion which is now mistaken for an anticlimax, would be devoted with a single purpose to its two superb contrasts — the revenge of Laertes with the revenge of Hamlet, and the utter madness of Ophelia with the semi-counterfeit lunacy of her lover. A gain almost as great for the closet, as for the stage.

And what a tremendous Act that Third one is! unrivalled in wealth of imagery, in exhaustless variety and steadily culmi-

nating power, by anything in creative art, unless it be the almost equally marvellous Festival Act of *Don Giovanni*. Mozart, like Shakespeare, had the faculty of perfect articulation; and hence the intense self-delight they constantly exhibit. They alone, and Raphael, have the faculty of projecting the *whole* shy and ever reluctant idea from the dim chambers of conception, into full, unclouded sunlight. Like all perfect embodiments, the works of Mozart, Raphael and Shakespeare cast their own shadows: the works of others — Beethoven, Goethe, Angelo — are shadows of the master's selves. It is a common vice to prefer the second *chiar-oscuro* to the first.

The present Fourth Scene of the Fourth Act, except the nine opening lines, is omitted in the Folio. It is needless to recapitulate the argument already advanced. With the Quarto before them and every temptation to expand, the long pendant to the entry of Fortinbras, must have been advisedly rejected by the editors of the

Folio. Heminge and Condell were at least as familiar with this scene as we are. Minor errors in abundance may have crept into the First Folio; minor omissions and additions may disfigure its text: it may be, as Horne Tooke says, 'the only edition worth regarding'; and, as Mr. Knight says, 'the most correctly printed book on record'; or it may have been, as Mr. Dyce believes, 'dismissed from the press with less care and attention than any book of any extent and reputation in the whole annals of English typography.' But the certainty still remains that Heminge and Condell, 'sober, earnest critics,' would never have dared to repudiate a long soliloquy that had a place in the *standard* acting copy — the standard ultimately fixed by Shakespeare himself, or with his distinct approval. A jest or two in Richard, an indecisive scene in Lear, might escape them; but not, of all things on earth, a *soliloquy* of Hamlet's — the *final* soliloquy too!

Unquestionably, all that stately dialogue with the Captain is Shakespeare's: possibly he wrote the whole soliloquy, every line of it, just as it stands. Even in that age of giants 'sturdy but unclean,' there may have been no second touch to equal the felicity of

> Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event, —
> A thought, which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom,
> And ever three parts coward. ——

It may have been written to *strengthen* the Acts, or to please Burbage or whoever played the part: written, *tried*, and abandoned. For though a leading tragedian might cling to so tempting a bit of declamation, the house, the company, and the author, would be sure to reject it in the end. It is most awkwardly introduced — lugged in by the head and heels like a dead afterthought. It is the one speech too many that palsies both actor and audience;

that fails alike on the stage or in the closet; that superficially countenances the imputation of weakness and needlessly complicates the character. We can imagine the more than half-created Hamlet, statue-like uplifting his hand in sublime protest against the threatened malformation. After the other noble monologues, it is weak as water. But the supreme reason for its rejection is that it is *false*. —

> —— I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, 'This thing's to do';
> Sith *I have cause and will and strength and means*
> *To do it.*

He had not *strength* and *means* to do it, and could not have, until rescued from captivity and impending death by that well-appointed pirate. So, apart from its comparative feebleness, apart from its superfluity, apart from its being most lamely and discordantly introduced, 'I 'll be with you straight — go a little before,' — there is a *positive necessity* for its rejection: it is

FALSE! False and unnatural! For however happily his counterplot may terminate, it is surely not as a prisoner on the brink of exile, environed by the royal guards, that such a motive for self-reproach would occur. Though no one could *now* have the temerity to reject the scene, were it not rejected by the Folio; yet consciously and deliberately repudiated there, we may well feel at liberty to prefer the professional and disinterested verdict of Heminge and Condell, who certainly give no intimation in their preface that the original papers 'received from him' with scarce a blot, were destroyed as Mr. Dyce supposes, when the Globe Theatre was burned down in 1613. This ill-timed monologue though weak itself does not *really* make *Hamlet* essentially weaker; but there is no reason why the discarded superfluities of genius should be perpetuated only to obscure the pure gold of its priceless bequests. One thing however is clear: unless Hamlet planned the subsequent piratical capture,

the Soliloquy is not only superfluous and contradictory, but absurd. Unhappy as it is in all other respects, it serves to demonstrate conclusively that in Shakespeare's own mind, the piratical capture was a premeditated certainty.

With its present Fifth Scene, the Fourth Act properly begins. One victim has already fallen — Polonius: Ophelia is the next. The shock of her father's death by the hand of her lover, has crazed her. It would have suited most artists to exhibit the first crash of the tragical fact; but Shakespeare mercifully spares us the sight of the blow descending on that vestal forehead. Her mind is murdered *off* the stage. The grand master will not overcharge his canvas with details which a lesser soul would grasp at. The spiritual transformation is complete before she reappears. Instead of horror heaped on horror, the very madness of this Rose of May is turned 'to favor and to prettiness.' She softens the gloom and terror of the play into over-

powering pathos. Though her character has been only sketched, as if by the finger of a god, in snow, what a vast dramatic purpose it serves! Her madness is the pivot of one Act, her burial of another; her maiden beauty the inspiration of both; while, over the whole tragic expanse, her image flits like the dove that followed the raven! What can be sadder than her story! But a little while ago, she was bewailing the overthrow of 'that noble and most sovereign reason,' and now the sweet bells of her own mind are not only jangled out of tune, but ruined, broken! One tithe of the woe that Hamlet carries, suffices to crush her. As if in rebuke of that impatient Ghost, the first attempt at revenge involves the sacrifice of this unblemished innocent. But Hamlet escapes the spectacle. By an inspired fitness of events, his banishment just precedes her madness. His self-contained lunacy could never have endured the test of her hopeless, absolute madness. The side by side contrast of real

with simulated insanity, though sustained to advantage in Lear, between a young noble and an old king, would be a ghastly impossibility between lovers.

Ophelia is stark mad. The only gleam of a purpose left is in the brief threat that Laertes will avenge her father: 'My brother shall know of it': her only memories are dim, distracted impressions of the events that crazed her; songs of Polonius—

——dead and gone,
At his head a grass green turf,
At his feet a stone.
White his shroud, as the mountain snow
Larded with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the grave did go
With true-love showers.

And again:

And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death bed,
He never will come again.

His beard was white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll:
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan:
God ha' mercy on his soul!

Songs of Hamlet too: 'To-morrow is St. Valentine's day.' The whole ditty is but the reflex of her discarded lover's passionate jesting, the dark shadow of masculine yearning projected athwart the snows of virgin purity, deeper and distincter in this intellectual eclipse; the wild echo of his own fierce raillery resounding from the living sepulchre wherein her maiden mind lies buried.

And sometimes too, the twin ideas to which her bewildered brain is feebly clinging, her love and her grief, run incoherently together:

They bore him barefaced on the bier;
Hey non nonny nonny, hey nonny;
And on his grave rain'd many a tear,——
Fare you well, my dove!

And again:

There 's a daisy: — I would give you some violets, but they withered all
When my father died: they say he made a good end. —
For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy. ——

Ah, how true, how mournful, but above all, how marvellous this inspired imagination in whose imperishable mirror humanity seems more tangible, more intelligible, than even in its own bodily substance! Seeing nature with Shakespeare's eyes, is like reading the heavens with a glass of infinite range and power; wonder on wonder rolls into view; systems, dependencies, mysteries, relations, never before divined; tokens of other atmospheres, gleams of erratic luminaries that seem to spurn all law yet move obedient to one complex impulse; glimpses of fresh courier light cleaving the vast immensity on its way to our yet unvisited world, and all the while, the soul, uplifted by

the vision, is flooded with the very music of the spheres.

If aught were wanting to render this play the supreme masterpiece of human genius, it is found in the contrast between Hamlet and Laertes, each with a father murdered, and each impatient for revenge. Laertes is a hero after the popular heart; gallant, passionate, resolute; moving as level to his aim 'as the cannon to his blank.' He hardly hears of his father's death, before he is in Denmark; hardly in Denmark, before he storms the Palace. Unscrupulous, unconscientious, irreligious, he drives madly on where Hamlet is compelled to halt.

To hell allegiance! vows to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation: to this point I stand,
That *both* the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes; only I 'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

With inimitable skill the mighty dramatist details precisely the forfeiture of soul from

which Hamlet, except in one wild tumult of delirious wrath, steadily recoils.

Hamlet's hands are tied by conscience and faith: Laertes has, practically, neither; has a talent for blasphemy; delights in daring the gods to do their worst; would be glad to cut a throat in the Church. Yet how pitifully dwarfed is the son of Polonius, beside the son of the Sea-King! How he quails before the royal pair that in Hamlet's grasp were powerless as sparrows in the clutches of an eagle! It seems as if Shakespeare had anticipated the demand for more dash in his hero, and presented this type of a fast young soldier only to exalt the grandeur of the much misconstrued prince. Those who point to Laertes' prompt action to revenge his father's death, in contrast to Hamlet's delay, forget that Hamlet's father was thought to have died a natural death. Hamlet had *no proof* to verify his suspicions; — his only witness was the Ghost! Beside the measured, principled retribution of Hamlet, the revenge

of Laertes is vulgar, cowardly and criminal; his anathemas but the coarse mouthing of a school-boy. Imagine for a moment that 'Cutpurse of the Empire' venturing to say to Hamlet, —

> Why now you speak
> Like a good child, and a true gentleman.

Or conceive, in Hamlet's mouth, that rant about 'the life-rendering pelican.'

Midway between these two extremes, — the unreflecting braggart and the self-accuser 'thinking too precisely on the event,' — lie the classical hero and the Christian saint. Either would have disposed of the case in a more summary way; the saint by unhesitating and complete forgiveness; the hero proper by a revenge less dilatory than Hamlet's and less treacherous than Laertes'. That the patience of a saint may be rendered as sublimely dramatic as the vindictiveness of a sinner, is proved by Calderon in his *Principe Constante.* But Shakespeare has not chosen

to represent a saint, but to show how even a fair infusion of Christian faith must modify the ancient heroic model. The hero in whom religion dominates, would be a higher ideal; the hero in whom unhesitating and unsullied valor dominates, a greater personal favorite: but neither perhaps would have such a hold on the wide heart of humanity, or prove such a permanent joy and wonder, as this prolonged uncertain struggle of matchless intellect and bewildered conscience with madness and despair.

Hamlet is exalted over the mere man of animal courage and passion, not only intellectually and physically, but morally too. The reckless 'darer of damnation' is unfortunately ready to dare dishonor too. The King might have spared himself the pains of feeling his way so nicely how far in villainy he could venture without shocking his man. They are both of a mind, although the master villain is the King:

King. —— With ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbaited, and, in a pass of practice,
Requite him for your father.
Laertes. —— I will do it:
And for that purpose, I 'll anoint my sword.
King. —— I 'll have proffer'd him
A chalice for the nonce; whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,
Our purpose may hold there.

Thus thickens the plot: in the foreground, the two conspirators, vindictive, eager, aggressive; in the distance, with Horatio, the great defensive avenger, moving ghostlike to his doom and theirs!

The King has been driven to these desperate measures by the news of Hamlet's escape and return: —

Mess. Letters, my lord, from Hamlet. —
King. From Hamlet! (*reads*) 'High and mighty,

> —you shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes.' —

'*High and mighty!*' What grim sardonic scorn! How it smites him between the brows, as if with an axe! '*High and mighty!*' How the outmanœuvred assassin starts and staggers beneath the blow.

> What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?
> Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?
> *Can you advise me?*

He is stretched on a prelusory rack, to which instant death were mercy.

The letter to Horatio is longer:

> Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase: Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, etc.

Before discussing the rest of the letter, let us examine this perpetually misunderstood piratical capture. We have already noticed

Hamlet's first glance at it, '*I see a cherub that sees them.*' But there is a previous most positive and most specific allusion to it, at the close of the interview with his mother:

O 't is most sweet
Where in one line two *crafts* directly meet.

If the word *crafts* had its present maritime significance in Shakespeare's time, the double meaning is suggestive of a prearranged capture. *How* arranged, is neither here nor there; but opportunities of chartering a free cruiser could not have been wanting to a prince of Denmark; and what is more significant, *the fleet of Fortinbras was then in port at Elsinore.* There is an understanding, just ever so vaguely glanced at, between the two young princes. But the following lines admit of but one interpretation; especially in connection with his *perfect willingness* to go:

There 's letters sealed: and my two schoolfellows, —
Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd, —

They bear the mandate: *they* must sweep my way,
And marshal me to knavery. *Let it work;*
For 't is the sport to have the enginer
Hoist with his own petard; and 't shall go hard
BUT I WILL DELVE ONE YARD BELOW THEIR MINES
AND BLOW THEM TO THE MOON!

One would think it required a miraculous allowance of critical obtuseness to ignore a counterplot so strikingly pre-announced. Yet, opening Coleridge, you find 'Hamlet's capture by the pirates: how judiciously in keeping with the character of the over-meditative Hamlet, ever at last *determined by accident* or by a fit of passion!' And opening Ulrici you find, 'He cheerfully obeys the command to visit England, evidently with the view, and in the hope, of there obtaining the means and opportunity (perhaps the support of England, and a supply of money and men, for an open quarrel with his uncle) to set about the work in a manner worthy both

of himself and its own importance.' God save the mark! '*Accident* frustrates his plans. Captured by pirates, he is set on shore in Denmark against his will,' etc. And, opening Wilhelm Meister you find Hamlet's 'capture by pirates, and the death of the two courtiers by the letter which they carried,' regarded as 'injuring exceedingly the unity of the piece, *particularly as the hero has no plan.*' After such obvious, amazing misconception, one may be pardoned for believing he sees

> ——'Two points in Hamlet's soul
> Unseized by the Germans yet.'

To make assurance doubly sure, comes the letter to Horatio, 'In the grapple, *I boarded them*; on *the instant* they got clear of *our ship:* so I *alone* became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like *thieves of mercy*; BUT THEY KNEW WHAT THEY DID.' Can circumstantial proof go farther? Could any twelve men of sense, on such a record, acquit Hamlet of being

an accessory before, as well as after, the fact?

The act ends with the Queen's narration of Ophelia's death, swanlike, singing her soul away under the willow aslant the brook. But before passing to the Fifth Act, notice how the Grand Master has summed up and defined in one word the exact amount of disease in Hamlet's mind:

> That I *essentially* am not in madness,
> But mad in craft.

With this flashing line of light, the great poet marks the precise limits of Hamlet's melancholy so sharply, that any attempt at a clearer statement is but to gild refined gold, or paint the lily. If the text is abstruse, any comment must be more so.

Up to the end of the Third Act, the material was so superabundant that the story of Hamlet may be said to have thus far written itself. But the most consummate art was required to furnish incident enough for the two remaining Acts, and

invent a catastrophe that should prove an adequate solution of all this tangled skein of action, thought and agony.

We have seen how perfectly the Fourth Act manages to connect the past and future of the drama by a present which, although replete with a tragic interest of its own, is also in an eminent degree both retrospective and prophetic. But the development of the Fifth Act was inconceivably more difficult: it is the creation of a world, not out of mental chaos, but out of nothing. In this wonderful Act, paltry accessories, small side-bits of detail, are so exalted, transfigured and divinely illuminated, that they assume the dignity of events. Here, in marked perfection we see —

'The grace and versatility of the man.'
'His power and consciousness and self-delight.'

We accept as matters of course, — we make no marvel now over those wonderful clowns, and Yorick's skull; the funeral procession, the grapple in the grave, and

Osric: but viewed solely as dramatic contrivances, they are miracles of construction. The deep funereal gloom, the weird sepulchral torch-light, which was thrown around the first three acts by means of the Ghost, is extended over the last two by means of Ophelia.

Hamlet's tilt with the sexton is not the least enjoyable of his encounters, or the easiest of his victories. In a trial of wit between prince and clown, as in a battle between a lion and a fly, insignificance is apt to have the best of it. But even at this disadvantage, Hamlet's patient courtesy is eventually an overmatch for the sexton's shrewd and superhumanly aggravating incivility. The caustic old curmudgeon absolutely grows genial beneath the calm unruffled smile of him that was mad and sent into England.

Clown. Here 's a skull now; this skull hath lain far in the earth three-and-twenty years.

Ham. Whose was it?

Clown. A whoreson mad fellow's it was; whose do you think it was?

Ham. Nay, I know not.

Clown. A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'a poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the King's jester,

Ham. This?

Clown. E'en that.

Ham. Let me see. Alas! poor Yorick!

And at the first full cadence of that divine voice, the sexton is mute forever!

(Enter Priests, &c., in procession; the corpse of OPHELIA, LAERTES *and Mourners following; King, Queen, their trains, &c.)*

Ham. But soft! but soft! aside; here comes the King.
The Queen, the courtiers: who is it that they follow
And with such maiméd rites?

Horatio is silent: apprehensive of mischief should Hamlet and Laertes meet: unable to tell his friend that Ophelia is dead.

Laer. What ceremony else!
Ham. That is Laertes,
A very noble youth: mark.
Laer. What ceremony else?
Priest. Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
As we have warranty; her death was doubtful:
And that but great command o'ersways the order,
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd
Till the last trumpet.
Laer. Must there no more be done?
Priest. No more be done:
We should profane the service of the dead
To sing a requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls.
Laer. Lay her i' the earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling.
Ham. What, the fair Ophelia!
Queen. Sweets to the sweet: farewell!
(Scattering flowers.)

I hop'd thou shouldst have been my
Hamlet's wife:
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked,
sweet maid,
And not to have strew'd thy grave.

How different this high-bred, graceful lament from the low wailing of Laertes. This choleric stripling, whose heart was in Paris; who cowers before a 'King of shreds and patches,' yet bullies an irresponsible and discretionless priest; who had even more than the full fraternal indifference to his sister until she lost her reason and her life; this small Hector must now make a scene over her dead body. And such a scene! His plunge into the open grave is unworthy of the mountebank from whom he bought the mortal unction; his invocation enough to madden any honest onlooker. All that palpable rant, all that sham despair, all that base mortal thunder, in the holy grave of the unpolluted girl!

O treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursed head
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Deprived thee of! Hold off the earth awhile,
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms:
(Leaps into the grave.)
Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
Till of this flat, a mountain you have made,
To o'ertop old Pelion, or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.

Hamlet's instant advance is like the swoop of an eagle, the charge of a squadron, the levelled curse of a prophet.

What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet, the Dane. *(Leaps into the grave.)*
Laer. The devil take thy soul!
(Grappling with him.)
Ham. Thou prayest not well.
I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat;

For, though I am not splenetive and rash,
Yet have I in me something dangerous,
Which let thy wisdom fear; hold off thy hand!

King. Pluck them asunder. —

Queen. Hamlet, Hamlet!

All. Gentlemen. —

Hor. Good my lord, be quiet. —

(The attendants part them and they come out of the grave.)

Ham. Why, I will fight with him upon this theme
Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

Queen. O my son! What theme?

Ham. *I lov'd Ophelia;* forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum. — What wilt thou do for her?

King. O he is mad, Laertes.

Queen. For love of God forbear him.

Ham. 'Swounds, *show* me what thou 'lt *do;*
Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?
Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?

> *I'll* DO'T. — Dost thou come here *to whine?*
> To outface *me* with leaping in her grave?
> *Be* buried quick with her, and so will I:
> And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
> *Millions* of acres on us, till our ground,
> Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
> Make Ossa like a wart! *Nay, an thou'lt mouth.*
> I'll rant as well as thou.

What can be juster, what can be grander! Mortal love and manly scorn were never strung before or since to such sublime intensity. The foot of true love lies on the prostrate sham love, like the foot of Michael on Lucifer; though here the angelic brow is flushed and ruffled with the rage of combat. The 'living monument' promised by the King is already in position: over the dead maiden stands the doomed lover, proclaiming his full faith before assembled Denmark in tones, whose

echoes ringing down the aisles of death, must have conveyed to her ransomed soul and reillumined mind the dearest tribute of mortality to perfect the chalice of spiritual bliss. (That sweet face on the threshold of another sphere, must have turned earthward awhile to catch those noble, jealous words.) Yet this superb and well-merited rebuke has been criticised as a mere 'yielding to passion,' as a 'sudden fall, from the calm height of philosophical reflection on the frailty of human life, into the degrading depths of youthful passion and inconsiderateness;' while the whole scene has been charged with 'meditative excess,' and with impeding the proper march of the action, forgetting that it is pardonable, and natural, under the terrible shock of this first sudden knowledge of Ophelia's death while standing by her open grave! Heaven help us, how we grumble over God's best manna in the desert! Time, place, and circumstance considered, that annihilation of

Laertes is one of the sublimest assertions of moral and intellectual supremacy in all Shakespeare.

Minds of surpassing reach, hearts of love, souls of truth, enjoy the lordly right to acquit others and blame themselves. And when, as in Hamlet's case, this magnanimity is accompanied by refined idealism and morbid delicacy, the smallest approach to violence, however pardonable, is apt to furnish a ground for self-reproach. Even before leaving the grave-yard he attempts a reconciliation, —

> Hear you, Sir;
> What is the reason that you use me thus?
> I loved you ever.

His subsequent regret is but another grace of his 'most generous' nature.

> But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
> That to Laertes I forgot myself;
> For, by the image of my cause, I see
> The portraiture of his: I 'll court his favours.

He has *then* had time for reflection: time for conversation with his invaluable

friend; time to realize the heart-rending fact that Ophelia must have believed him the *wilful* murderer of her father, and that Laertes and all the world, except his mother, were justified in so regarding him. It was under the spell of conscious innocence and ignorant or forgetful of this constructive guilt that he leaped into the grave. He now comprehends and pardons the indignation of Laertes; but his own conduct was far less influenced by the violence of the son, than by the exaggerated ranting of the brother. For he cannot help adding, with a glow of reanimated disdain:

> But, sure, the *bravery* of his grief did put me
> Into a towering passion.

Just as Hamlet's exact mental condition was determined by the line of light,

> That I *essentially* am not in madness
> But mad in craft: —

so in this scene, the essence of his charac-

ter is revealed by another flash of discriminating genius:

> For though I am not splenetive and rash,
> Yet have I in me something *dangerous*.

Yet the King, relying on the double death prepared by himself and Laertes, is singularly tranquil.

> Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son,
> *An hour of quiet* shortly shall we see;
> Till then, in patience, our proceeding be.

That hour of quiet never arrives. In the conversation with Horatio, that opens the last scene, there is more about the voyage to England. Hamlet knew well enough that his conductors were marshalling him to knavery; but the unsealing of their grand commission, and the device of a new one, was a sudden inspiration.

> There 's a divinity that shapes our ends
> Rough-hew them how we will. —

Much follows from this unpremeditated

and most legitimate theft: it is as fertile of results as the dropping of the handkerchief in *Othello*. In the first place, besides ascertaining the full extent of the royal knavery, he obtains full proof, under the royal seal, of the King's villainy. In the second place, this royal commission, which, in the presentiment or rather in the assurance of speedy death, he entrusts to Horatio, will be a justification before the world of the blow which must soon be delivered; will shield the princely name, about which he is so solicitous, from posthumous obloquy, and assist in consigning the seeming-virtuous wearer of the precious diadem to everlasting infamy. In the third place, Rosecrantz and Guildenstern, those supple traitors to all the rights of fellowship, to all the consonancy of youth, to all the obligations of ever preserved love, are finally though most cruelly disposed of by this *de jure* King of Denmark, who carries his father's signet in his purse. *They* are not even *near* his conscience;

—— their defeat
Does from their own insinuation grow:
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.

What perfect nerve, what ready wit, what jubilant power, in sitting calmly down and writing *fairly* out that earnest conjuration from the King. Nor is that earnest conjuration dictated by malice against his former friends, but purely in self-defense. It is the only *second* hope on which he can count; for if the chances of the sea prevent the contemplated rescue, he is infallibly lost without that earnest conjuration.

The whole 'rash' undertaking is a supplemented plot; a reserved escape; an 'indiscretion' only meant to serve in case his pirate plot should fail. For, two days at sea without sign of the friendly pirate, it was not unnatural that his fears should forget his manners. Besides, there was more than a chance, in the event of his

escape, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern returning to Denmark, *as they should have done* when they lost Hamlet, instead of keeping on to England. What determined them to 'hold their course,' could only have been either the fear of facing their royal master after Hamlet's escape, or an absurd supposal that Hamlet would follow them, if released, rather than risk a return to Elsinore. Be that as it may, Hamlet's measures are strictly defensive and strictly justifiable; their doom is exclusively the result of their own obtrusiveness and folly. Still, we cannot acquit the Prince of the same cold cruelty that he showed at the death of Polonius. He might have made prison their doom instead of death, though it is true that in Shakespeare's time cruelty and torture were terribly prevalent and men were callous. Horatio's ignorance of the capture is no argument against its being premeditated. It would have been very unlike Hamlet, either to compromise his friend, who remained at court in ser-

vice of the King, or to extend his secret needlessly.

Indeed it is only after hearing all the details of the royal knavery, that Horatio, true liegeman to the Dane, although belonging to the party of the future, exclaims, '*Why, what a king is this?*' — And it is only then that Hamlet ventures far enough to say to this noble, single-minded soldier, whom he never could or would have tempted into treason, whose good opinion is the only human verdict he cares for, — it is only then he ventures on that fearful summing up:

Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon?
He that hath kill'd my king, ——
Popp'd in between the election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage; is 't not *perfect conscience*,
To quit him with this arm? and is 't not to be damn'd,
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

The honorable officer and gentleman is silent; but the fast friend and wary man of action answers:

It must be shortly known to him from England
What is the issue of the business there.

Hamlet's reply includes all that need be said between them; two such men soon understand each other:

It will be short: the interim is mine;
And a man's life no more than to say — one?

After that the conversation instantly changes.

It must have been observed that Hamlet is the most elliptical, as well as the profoundest, of the tragedies. Here, especially, Shakespeare unrolls his grand, mysterious panorama, without vouchsafing a word of explanation; here, especially, he imitates the great Creator, in permitting us the inexhaustible delight of penetrating the veiled secrets of his mighty works; here, especially, he arrays his tragic events as they occur in real life, leaving

great gaps to be filled by inference or conjecture; here, especially, although far from aiming at the significant obscurity which Goethe constantly affected, he seems to disdain wearing his secret on his sleeve: and instead of tying his reader down to a single view, allows him a standpoint and speculations of his own. We are left to *infer* the interval, and objects of delay; to *infer* the reasons of all that singular behavior to Ophelia; to *infer* the piratical capture; to *infer* a thousand subtle things everywhere beneath the surface. The farther the play progresses, the more elliptical it becomes. The last scene is the most elliptical of all: it *begins* with an ellipsis. You never suspect the errand Hamlet is on, until you happen to hear that little word '*The interim is mine!*' It means more mischief than all the monologues! No threats, no imprecations; no more mention of smiling, damned villain; no more self-accusal; but solely and briefly —

It will be short: the interim is mine!

Then, for the first time, we recognize the extent of the change that has been wrought in Hamlet; then, for the first time, we perfectly comprehend his quiet jesting with the clown, his tranquil musings with Horatio, his humorous recital of the events of the night aboard the vessel, when the fighting in his heart would not let him sleep. The man is transformed by a great resolve: *his mind is made up!* He has now placed in the safe possession of Horatio the Royal Commission containing the full proof of the King's villainy. The return of the vessel from England will be the signal for his own execution and therefore the moral problem is solved: the only chance of saving his life from a lawless murderer, is to slay him; it has become an act of self-defense: he can do it with *perfect conscience.* He has calculated the return voyage; he has allowed the longest duration to his own existence and the King's; he has waited to the very

last moment for the intervention of a special providence. 'Now or never must the blow be struck!'

All this and more is revealed by that one word, '*The interim is mine!*' At the very moment he encounters the clown in the churchyard, he is on his death march to the Palace at 'Elsinore.' The only interruption of the calm resolve by which he is now possessed, is the affair with Laertes, to which he turns the conversation in princely care of Horatio's spotless honor. Is not all this indirectly but unerringly conveyed? And yet how curiously our standard criticism ignores it.

Horatio starts at the coming footstep, as if he had been listening to treason: 'Peace! who comes here?' As the vexed stream of Hamlet's life approaches the abyss, the foam and anguish of the rapids subside; and just over the level brink of calm and light that edges the fall, hovers the 'water-fly,' Osric. Hamlet is patient with him — almost as patient as with the sexton —

although constitutionally merciless to a fool; whether a fool circuitous like Polonius, a fool rampant like Laertes, or a fool positive like Osric. It is the last of his intellectual engagements, this singular duel between a dunce on the threshold of existence, and the stately gentleman but three steps from the grave. All forms and degrees of intellect have been dwarfed beside this most sovereign reason: the final contrast is between godlike apprehension and sheer fatuity. The King's 'Give them the foils, young Osric,' inclines us to think that Osric was even more knave than fool. The creature appointed to *shuffle* those unequal foils could hardly have failed to detect the *one* unbated point. But he is too slight for dissection.

With the extinction of this water-fly, the great catastrophe approaches. Only once, and for a moment, the shadow of the coming death depresses him.

Hor. You will lose this wager, my lord.
Ham. I do not think so; since he went into

France, I have been in continual practice; I shall win at the odds. Thou would'st not think how ill all 's here about my heart; but it is no matter.

Hor. Nay, good my lord.

Ham. It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Hor. If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

Ham. Not a whit; we defy augury; there 's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 't is not to come; if it be not now, yet it will come; the *readiness* is all: since no man of aught he leaves, knows what is 't to leave betimes? —

After this last inevitable sigh, there is no more repining. His smile is that of the *morituri te salutant!* He longs to be at peace with all mankind but one; most of all with *Ophelia's brother.* The Quarto ruins his whole exquisite apology, by making it a suggestion of the Queen's;

the Folio, by another masterly omission, leaves it his own free, spontaneous offering. His superabundant penitence completes itself in this acme of courtesy. Alas Laertes! —

I do receive your offered love like love,
And will not wrong it:

his fingers itching, as he speaks, for that unbated and envenomed foil. What a refined tenderness in the remote suggestion of Ophelia that lurks in Hamlet's answer:

Ham. I embrace it freely,
And will this *brother's* wager frankly play,
Give us the foils. — Come on.

The ocular pathos of the scene is terrible; yonder skipping water-fly; the King less patient with the chalice for the nonce, than Laertes with his anointed steel; trumpets and cannon without; Lords and attendants within: and, circled by

this pageant of death, supported only by Horatio and the sympathy of his unsuspecting mother, the chosen victim of the holiday, passionless, fearless, and seemingly powerless; without a fixed 'plan for the execution of his just revenge,' to quote the words of Mr. Strachey, 'but what is much better, the faith that an *opportunity* will present itself, and the resolution to seize it instantly.' Let the Embassy from England enter! He is face to face with his foe, sure of his man, even were the smiling villain twice a king!

Hamlet justifies the sinister calculation on his innate nobility of soul.

——he, being remiss,
Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils.

He asks but one matter of course question:

Ham. These foils have all a length?
Osric. Ay, my good lord. (*They prepare to play.*)

King. Come, begin;
And you the judges bear a wary eye. —
Ham. Come on, Sir.
Come, my lord. (*They play.*)
Ham. One. —
Laer. No.
Ham. Judgment.
Osric. A hit, a very palpable hit. —
Laer. Well; again.

The King cannot kill him fast enough. The first bout is hardly over before he orders up the supplemental bowl. But memories of the 'juice of cursèd Hebanon' may have crossed Hamlet's mind; he will not touch the leperous distilment:

King. Give him the cup.—
Ham. I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile. —
Come another hit, what say you? (*They play.*)
Laer. A touch, a touch, I do confess.
King. Our son shall win.
Queen. He's fat and scant of breath. —
Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows:

The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

Ham. Good, madam!

King. Gertrude, do not drink.

Queen. I *will*, my lord; I pray you pardon me.

King. It is the poison'd cup; it is too late. (*Aside.*)

Ham. I dare not drink yet, madam; by and by.

Queen. Come let me wipe thy face.

How characteristic of the Queen! doting on her son, dictating to her husband to the last! Woe and confinement have left their mark on the outward as well as the inward Hamlet: the 'mould of form' has lost its earlier grace, his breath is short, the sweat stands on his brow; but at the first visitation of that Berserker wrath, he is terrible, as resistless as ever.

Laer. My lord, I 'll hit him now.

King. I do not think 't.

Laer. And yet 't is almost 'gainst my conscience. (*Aside.*)

Ham. Come, for the third, Laertes, you but dally:

I pray you pass with your best violence;
I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

Laer. Say you so! Come on. (*They play.*)

Osric. Nothing, neither way.

Laer. Have at you now!

Laertes wounds Hamlet: then in scuffling, they change rapiers, and Hamlet wounds Laertes. No accidental exchange, for Laertes would only have surrendered his unbated foil to the sternest compulsion of superior force; nor could Hamlet well have been unaware of that venomed stuck and the warm blood that followed it.

King. Part them; they are incens'd.

Ham. Nay, come again.
(*The Queen falls.*)

Osric. Look to the Queen there, ho! —

Hor. They bleed on both sides — How is it, my lord?

Osric. How is 't Laertes? —

Laer. Why as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric;
I am justly killed with mine own treachery.

What a fearful triumph in Hamlet's '*Nay, come again!*' His wound is older, — the poison longer in his veins, than in his murderer's; yet, statue-like he stands at bay, erect, alert, defiant, comprehending all at a glance, absolute master of the situation! The mutes and audience to the act are less awed by the terror of the spectacle, than spell-bound, by the majestic attitude of the avenger

Ham. How does the Queen? —
King. She swoons to see them bleed.
Queen. No, no, the drink, the drink, — O my dear Hamlet, —
The drink, the drink! — I am poison'd.
(*Dies.*)
Ham. O villainy! — Ho! let the door be locked;
Treachery! seek it out.
Laer. It is here, Hamlet: Hamlet thou art slain;
No medicine in the world can do thee good,
In thee there is not half an hour of life;

The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
Unbated and envenom'd; the foul practice
Hath turned itself on me; lo, here I lie,
Never to rise again: thy mother's poison'd:
I can no more: the King, the King's to blame.

Ham. The point envenom'd too?

Its being *unbated* was a superfluous revelation. Without pause, or with such pause as the panther makes when crouching for the leap, the final blow is delivered at last:

Then venom to thy work! — (*Stabs the King.*)

All. Treason! treason!

They find their voices at last, these lords, attendants, guards and soldiers. But to what purpose? They *dare* not cross the path of that solitary champion of the grave, — not though invoked by

the piteous appeal of their bleeding King! —

O, yet defend me, friends; I am but hurt.

An instant more, and the hand of Hamlet is on his throat. If the archangel of judgment stood amongst them, they could not crouch more helplessly paralyzed beneath the lifted sword of fire, than before this awful incarnation of doom!

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damnéd Dane,
Drink of this poison: — *is thy union here?*
Follow my mother! —

O the awful irony of that fell interrogative! deadlier, bitterer than steel or bowl! The last lightning of that departing intelligence! With one outstretched arm he plucks their monarch from their midst, drags him to the ground, pinions him between his feet; with the other, forces the 'potent poison' down the reluctant throat, — overwhelming, in one tremendous second, the prostrate villain with a thousand deaths.

The King is ground to dust in that lurid hurricane of passion! mind, soul, and body shrivel up in that furnace of wrath! And so it might have been, at almost any moment, since that night on the platform. The Prince was conscious of this latent, immeasurable force; it never yet failed him at need; at the right moment, it was ever sure to come at his call. An avenger so justly confident of his strength may safely await the hour when retribution is so righteous and complete that it resembles less a human intervention than a divine dispensation.

The last prayer, even more than the last confession, of Laertes, extorts our compassion:

> Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet:
> Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
> Nor thine on me. (*Dies.*)

Ham. Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.

There is nothing so pathetic, nothing so heroic in literature, as the last moments of this superb young Prince, — pierced with an envenomed wound, bleeding, reeling, dying, yet making that unbated and thrice ensanguined foil, the unquestioned sceptre of the moment for friend and foe; wrestling with Horatio for the bowl, as fiercely as with Laertes in Ophelia's grave; triumphant up to the very gates of death. He has more the flash and motion of a Homeric god than of a man.

> I am dead, Horatio.—Wretched Queen, adieu!—
> You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time, (as this fell sergeant, death,
> Is strict in his arrest,) O I could tell you,
> But let it be — Horatio, I am dead;

Thou liv'st; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

Hor. Never believe it:
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
Here 's yet some liquor left.

Ham. As thou 'rt a man,
Give me the cup: let go, by heaven I 'll have it. —
O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story. (*March afar off, and shot within.*)
What warlike noise is this?

Osric. Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To the ambassadors of England gives
This warlike volley.

Ham. O, I die, Horatio;

> The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit:
> I cannot live to hear the news from England;
> But I do prophesy the election lights
> On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice:
> So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,
> Which have solicited. — The rest is silence. (*Dies.*)

In this supreme hour, his mission accomplished; 'winning, not losing, the cause for which he dies;' sure, through Horatio, of the verdict of posterity, and calmly fronting the dread tribunals of eternity with a radically inviolate conscience; he says, half reproachfully, to death, as though it were his sole regret at leaving life, '*The rest is silence!*' Alas, for us as well as for him, the rest is silence! Silence for the lips whose music has had no equal since the birth of time; silence for the voice whose least recorded utterance remains an inspiration for all the

ages! The solution is complete. The wide repose of a perfect catastrophe extends to the remotest fibres of the plot. In the masterly lines assigned to Osric, the simultaneous arrival of Fortinbras and England is announced in one breath. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have fallen: once more the princely Norwegian, who represents the future, marches broadly into view, irradiating all that scene of havoc with the promise of a better day for Denmark. Nothing remains but for Horatio to tell

> —— the yet unknowing world
> How these things came about:

to sustain Fortinbras in claiming his vantage,

> And from *his* mouth *whose voice will draw no more!*

How beautiful that passing tribute to the eloquence of his dead friend!

In the sad, soldierly orders and martial

praise of Fortinbras the play finds its perfect consummation.

> Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have prov'd most royally; and, for his passage,
> The soldier's music and the rites of war
> Speak loudly for him. —
> Take up the bodies; such a sight as this
> Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
> Go, bid the soldiers shoot.
>
> *(A dead march. Exeunt, bearing off the dead bodies, after which a peal of ordnance is shot off.)*

This is the only play of Shakespeare's in which our interest in the central figure is compelled to extend itself beyond the grave. When Lear, Macbeth, or Othello die, our connection with them is dissolved: their mortality is the only thing that concerns us. Whereas, in Hamlet, we find ourselves gazing after him into that undiscovered country from whose bourne

no traveller returns, uniting in Horatio's exquisite adieu,

> Good night, sweet prince:
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

Hamlet is not directly on trial for his soul, but the question of eternal loss or gain is constantly suggested. It is the management of this deep shadow of the world to come; this complicated war between conscience and passion; this sharp contrast between providence and fate; this final appeal from time to eternity, that gives the drama such universal, indestructible interest. Its felicities of diction, miracles of invention, exhaustless variety of character; its splendor of imagery, constructive symmetry, and pre-eminent glory of thought, would abundantly account for the critical admiration it inspires; but the critical *awe* and popular love it never fails to awaken can only be attributed to that rare but sovereign charm with which the highest human genius can sometimes in-

vest a religious mystery. There is a poetic compulsion that after the fatal defeat of so blameless a youth, after a career of such unexampled, unprovoked agony, there should be in distinct perspective the ineffable amends of the hereafter. In Hamlet, Shakespeare has not only created a character but a soul. The deep spirituality of the part not only fills the play itself, but, acting as a centre of light, diffuses an ethereal lustre over all his works, and supplies the most imperishable element of his immortality. Strike any other single play from the list, and though the loss would be irreparable, yet the main characteristics of the entire fabric would remain radically the same. Strike out Hamlet, and the aspect of the whole structure is hopelessly altered.

Macbeth

(*A Fragment. Left unfinished by the death of the author.*)

Macbeth is one of the twenty plays which first appeared in print in the Folio of 1623. It was probably written in 1605, perhaps two or three years after Hamlet; acted probably in 1606, certainly in 1610, at the Globe Theatre. With the exception perhaps of Lear, it is the latest of the four tragedies.

Macbeth himself is one of Shakespeare's great *criminal* characters. In Hamlet, intellect, individual force, and courage were on the side of innocence: in Macbeth, intellect, energy, and daring are on the side of guilt. In Hamlet, the villain of the piece is a cunning, cowardly voluptuary of small intelligence and smaller will; unscrupulous, unconscientious, unredeemed by a single approxi-

mation to virtue unless it be implied fidelity to an incestuous love. In Macbeth, the hero is bold, ambitious, dauntless, dangerous; with a mind of vast undisciplined power: striding from guilt to deeper guilt with a speed accelerated by remorseful self-abhorrence. The "King of shreds and patches" is a self-impelled, instinctively and elaborately hyprocritical assassin, who takes his rouse, keeps midnight wassail, drains his draughts of Rhenish down; who clings complacently to his crown, his own ambition, and his queen; a smiling Cain, who, with but one faint effort at remorse, finds life a joy till Hamlet teaches him to fear.

The Thane of Cawdor is driven half reluctantly to crime by a spell of "Magic sleight" and the horrible compulsion of a fiend-like woman. When he murders Duncan he murders sleep; puts rancours in the vessel of his peace; eats his daily meal in fear and shakes nightly in the affliction of terrible dreams: sees a gory

shadow at his banquets, begins to be a-weary of the sun, and instead of being sleeker for his sinning, is scared and roughened by a fierce despair. Instead of the academic gentleness of a prince of thirty, we have here the matured manhood of a veteran soldier: instead of ellipsis, complexity and oblique suggestiveness, all is plain and direct; the plot ascends with great broad pyramidal steps which there is no mistaking, you *cannot* misconceive the purport and direction; the only difficulty is in keeping up with the gigantic stride of the action. The very versification reflects this essential contrast: it is bolder, rougher, compacter than Hamlet, although, more than once, it softens into riper harmony as if longer use had enriched the instrument in the master's hand.

The one point of resemblance between the two characters is imaginativeness. Paradoxical as it sounds at first, Macbeth is more imaginative and less courageous

than Hamlet. The one point of resemblance between the two plays is the introduction of the supernatural; and with this all likeness ends.

The remarks I have made on Hamlet may be considered little better than a running commentary on the text. I shall venture, however, to treat Macbeth in the same way, for I am persuaded that any satisfactory analysis of these wonderful plays must be mainly out of the poet's own mouth. Scholars and men of the world interpret Shakespeare in their own way or in obedience to established criticism; nor can I reasonably hope to make these Lectures of any great value to them, although, in Hamlet, this very object was perhaps too presumptuously undertaken. Every educated man has his own view of Shakespeare just as he has his own view of nature. It is almost as difficult to revolutionize his perception of one as of the other. Yet these fixed ideas admit of partial modification and

expansion: something may be gained by the suggestions and even by the errors of the commonest apprehension. It would be a curious infelicity if any discussion of the Four Tragedies, however imperfect in itself, were entirely devoid of general interest.

But to a very large class, Shakespeare has to be *taught*,—patiently and minutely expounded. This class embraces those debarred,—either by scruples of conscience or by want of opportunity,—from witnessing theatrical representations.

In the higher collegiate classes generally, my professional experience of eight years has taught me that Shakespeare, in *a schoolboy's* hands, was apt to be a dead letter,—little relished and less understood; whereas when interpreted to *them* even with the faintest approach to proper elocution, it was both felt and enjoyed. Nor do I think that the importance of thoroughly educating our college graduates in this greatest English author can

easily be overestimated. It is a mental and psychological enlargement which no other single work, and not every library, can bestow. In the exhaustless galleries of beauty, humor, pathos, passion, and power, through which the young mind is there conducted, a robust manly taste may be generated, that in after life will be sure to rebel against a literature which tends to degenerate from feminine grace into effeminate insipidity. There is many a bright fellow in school and college to whom Shakespeare, pure and simple in the silence of the study-room, would prove a bore; but there is scarcely a dunce past sixteen whose appreciation cannot be aroused, in an intelligently conducted class, as if scales had dropped from his eyes.

It would be well too if girls were judiciously familiarized with this mighty master. Our modern imaginative literature is so exclusively devoted to the portraiture of a single passion, — love, in

all its forms and deformities, delicacies and brutalities, old love and young love, good love and bad love, true love and false love, love heroic, love bucolic, love Platonic and love Satanic, — that it would really be a service to convince them early in life that there are other passions and emotions of which even the feminine heart is susceptible; that there are other things worth chronicling besides the development of personal attachment; that Lear may be entertaining although the hero is eighty, and Hamlet tolerable although agony has made the hero fat and scant of breath instead of thin; that Macbeth is interesting although the hero is marred and bruised and bronzed and middle aged.

It is for the large class above referred to, that the remainder of this course of Lectures is principally designed; and here, as in Hamlet, the quotations from the text will be fuller than if a maturer audience were more directly addressed.

The curtain rises on an open place, thunder and lightning, and the three witches — weird incarnations of diabolical temptation, semi-diabolical agents, semi-prescient of futurity, flitting an instant before the coming procession of horror like the advanced oriflame of hell, — then vanishing.

First Witch. When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
Sec. Witch. When the hurly burly 's done,
When the battle 's lost and won.
Third Witch. That will be ere set of sun.
First Witch. Where the place?
Sec. Witch. Upon the heath.
There to meet with Macbeth.
First Witch. I come, Graymalkin!
All. Paddock calls: — Anon! —
Fair is foul and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air. (*Witches vanish.*)

The story of the battle and Macbeth's prowess are told by a wounded sergeant; — the treason and death-sentence of Caw-

dor briefly announced; and then once more, amid the muttering thunder of the blasted heath, re-enter the ghastly three. Observe how wondrously they are sketched in; not with minute personal details like the solitary phantom in Hamlet, a treatment they could not endure, but with broad, vague characteristic touches. The enormous difficulty of inventing an appropriate language for such nondescripts is inconceivable to one who has not tried it. Yet how easily it flows! with what facility the same lips that catch the accents of humanity in its nearest approaches to deity, can also find a voice for the jargon of debased mortality in its lowest association with demonism.

First Witch. Where hast thou been, sister?
Sec. Witch. Killing swine.
Third Witch. Sister, where thou?
First Witch. A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
And munch'd, and munch'd, and munch'd;—

"Give me," quoth I:
"Aroint thee, witch! the rump-fed ronyon cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger.
But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
And, like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

Sec. Witch. I'll give thee a wind.

First Witch. Thou art kind.

Third Witch. And I another.

First Witch. I myself have all the other.—
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.
Look what I have.

Sec. Witch. Show me, show me.

First Witch. Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wreck'd as homeward he did come. (*Drum within.*)

Third Witch. A drum, a drum!
Macbeth doth come.

All. The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine

And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! — the charm 's wound up.
(*Enter* MACBETH *and* BANQUO.)

The roll of the Scottish drum breaking gradually in on this fantastical incantation, the entry of Macbeth and Banquo glittering in victorious armor, suddenly face to face with these crouching, malignant shapes, is brilliantly effective. The poorest pair of actors that ever trod the boards are sure of applause if only for the very power of the contrast. Observe how with one sweep of the brush these 'posters of the sea and land' are colored, the characters of the two conquerors discriminated, and the whole plot darkly foreshadowed. The chieftains do not at once perceive the ambushed witches: time is wisely allowed for the martial entry to take full effect: but as soon as the Three are seen how the startled thanes recoil from the incarnation of a dream with which neither was entirely unfamiliar. And mark how, as soon as addressed, the witches forsake their whis-

pering, crouching, mumbling diablerie and assume a dignity fitting the mistresses of the elements and oracles of the future.

Macb. So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

Banquo How far is 't called to Forres? — What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on 't? — Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: — you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

Macb. Speak if you can: — what are you?

First Witch. All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

Sec. Witch. All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

Third Witch. All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be King hereafter!

Ban. Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair? — I' the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt withal: — to me you speak not:
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
Speak, then, to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

First Witch. Hail!

Sec. Witch. Hail!

Third Witch. Hail!

First Witch. Lesser than Macbeth and greater.
Sec. Witch. Not so happy, yet much happier.
Third Witch. Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo.
First Witch. Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!
Macb. Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:
By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis;
But how of Cawdor? the thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman; and to be King
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence? or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you.
(*Witches vanish.*)
Ban. The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,

And these are of them: — whither
are they vanish'd?

Macb. Into the air; and what seem'd corporal melted
As breath into the wind. — Would they had stay'd!

Ban. Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?

Macb. Your children shall be kings.

Ban. You shall be king.

Macb. And thane of Cawdor too, — went it not so?

Ban. To the selfsame tune and words. — who 's there?

(*Enter* Ross *and* Angus.)

Both these men are ambitious, both not unfamiliar with a royal hope, yet while Banquo loftily repels the temptation, Macbeth is already a murderer at heart: 'My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical.' His subsequent hesitation is chiefly timidity, his subsequent remorse an excess

of superstitious imagination. How he gloats over the partial fulfilment of the weird prediction:

Glamis and thane of Cawdor:
The greatest is behind!

How instantly envious of Banquo:

Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the thane of Cawdor to me
Promis'd no less to them?

How rapt and how exultant:

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.

It is but the poorest self-deception to plead

If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.

His guilty purpose is already busied with details:

The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
(steep?)
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires:
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

All this fell determination in the face of the meek King who had just rewarded his valor with all the grace and guerdon a monarch can bestow; and who means to crown his bounty by a visit to his 'peerless kinsman.' It would only be repeating Coleridge to dwell upon this first fine contrast between Macbeth and Banquo. And, although collegians are chiefly here addressed, I do not feel at liberty consciously to detail views which have been already elaborated.

Macbeth's guilt is rendered infernal by the combined meekness, magnanimity, infirmities and lovingness of his victim. Duncan absolutely dotes on him, with but

a halting afterthought for the no less deserving Banquo. Lady Macbeth's estimate of her husband's character must not mislead us. It is just such an analysis of a human heart as a fiend might make from some lonely pinnacle of hell. She has abandoned herself, body and soul to ambition, — determined to be Queen though damned for it; her will and courage are so perfect, her demoniac logic so consistent, that his manly recoil from murder strikes her as coward benevolence, his scruples as so much piety misplaced. There is not much of the milk of human kindness in this man's bosom — it only seems so to *her*; his ambition is as criminal as human ambition can be, — her complaint of its being 'without the illness should attend it' proceeds from a full diabolical possession. His character brightens only when laid side by side with hers, as a villain might look a little whiter arm in arm with a fiend. She longs to infect him with her infernal malice:

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

Her dedication of herself to the powers of darkness, her invocation of night and hell and all the sightless substances that wait on nature's mischief, bind her more irrevocably, more sublimely, more distinctly to the arch-fiend's service than if the bond of blood and parchment had passed between them; the most dauntless, deliberate self-damnation ever perpetrated, — a positive wooing of eternal perdition, — a deadly, passionate appeal flashed into the very heart of hell. She is not simply fiendish, but palpably *fiend like*. A woman who acts this should have the lurid halo of the damned coiled visibly about her brows. What inborn demon in the man ever wedded him to such a wife? What a ghastly courtship it must have

been! Could she ever have loved? loved with all that reigning devil in her soul? Yet out of all womanhood, he singled her to be his own — and calls her 'dearest chuck,' and loves and fondles her! The surrender of feminine innocence to serpentine allurement is but the hard condition of Eden; the surrender of all manly honor to feminine solicitation is an absolute divorce between heaven and earth! The ruling grace of manhood is power, of womanhood submission. A woman may yield to the fascination of superior strength or subtlety, in slavish obedience to a mysterious instinct, without being radically influenced either by the virtues or the vices of her idol. But a cruel man so thoroughly bad hearted as to ignore all the redeeming influences of existence by loving a woman crueller than himself, may be said to excel her in guilt by the bare enormity of loving her. At bottom, Macbeth was worse than his wife. With half her undaunted mettle he would have ventured on twice

her crimes; for as soon as his courage is bolstered by despair, he outstrips her in guilt and leaves her fainting, distanced, dying in his gory pathway. The stalwart regicide hurrying from murder to murder, yet puttering with witches and quailing before the painted devil of his imagination, is in every way more despicable than the lost woman sublimely invoking the fiend she serves to avert the truer remorse by which she ultimately perishes.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep pace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,

And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry "Hold, hold!"

She is even happy in the completeness of her fierce intent, in the total extinguishment of human tenderness, in the passionate revelry of fully accepted sin. She is literally enamoured of guilt, intoxicated with demoniac desire. She springs to meet her coming lord with the exultant bound of a tigress to her mate when the scent of blood is on the night wind.

Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.
Macb. My dearest love,
Duncan comes here to-night.
Lady M. And when goes hence?
Macb. To-morrow as he purposes.

Lady M. O never
Shall sun that morrow see!
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters: — to beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under 't.
Macb. We will speak further.
Lady M. Only look up clear;
To alter favour ever is to fear;
Leave all the rest to me.

The great ruined man with all the gloom and agony of guilt in his face, — the woman smiling, happy, collected, tranquil as innocence. How her soul hisses out in those four words, 'And when goes hence?' Yet how colloquially Ristori glided over it! 'E quando si parte?' With just as little force and significance as if she were putting the question to a hackman on the

Lung' Arno. Ah, could we only have heard Rachel give the equivalent of that terrible question!

In fearful contrast with all this is the bland security of the venerable King. He enjoys the pleasant site of the castle and its nimble air; enjoys Banquo's nice dissertation about the temple-haunting martlet. His heart and lips are overflowing with royal courtesy: an ancient grace sparkles in all he says and does.

Give me your hand;
Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly,
And shall continue our graces towards him.
By your leave, hostess.

At that very instant, in a lobby in the castle, that same host is musing:

If it were done when 't is done, then 't were well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all *here*,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, —
We 'd jump the life to come.

But for certain temporal retribution, the life to come might be left out of the calculation, ignored, jumped. Observe how pointedly this is in contrast with Hamlet, who does not set his life at a pin's fee, who is only deterred by the dread of something *after* death. Macbeth would relinquish all hope of heaven were temporal success the sure consequence of assassination: he is daunted only by the impotence of murder to secure its ends even on this bank and shoal of time; only by the inevitable temporal atonement.

> But in these cases,
> We still have judgment here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague the inventor; this even-handed justice
> Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
> To our own lips.

It may seem gratuitous to dwell upon a soliloquy which, although somewhat obscure in its opening by reason of its massive thought, must be perfectly intelligible

to most readers. Yet as a sample of Shakespearean criticism, I may mention that Schlegel gravely cites, 'We'd jump the life to come' as evidence 'that Macbeth dreads the prospect of the life to come;' precisely the opposite of its first obvious meaning. The whole point of the lament is not that the eternal jewel of his soul is given to the common enemy of man, but (to blend two monologues) that rancours put poison in the chalice of his peace. The double dishonor of the meditated deed, the meek unprovokingness of the spotless King, are recited not in compassion but in regret that the sides of his intent have no other spur than vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself. His recoil is but a cowardly, selfish calculation of the chances against him: he will proceed no further in the business solely because he has been honored of late; because it would be a pity to cast aside the golden opinions of all sorts of people while in their newest gloss. Some flash of generous martial

repugnance may have visited him, but not articulately. His great fear is the fear of failure: his great regret the want of a satisfactory stimulant. His fear abates the instant his wife details the practicability of averting suspicion. A stimulant is supplied not only by the drink she furnishes but by her frightful, impetuous scorn. How she fastens on all the covert guilt lurking beneath his coy excuses; how she drags it bare and shivering to the surface; how she forces him with her terrible logic into open confession that the only difference between them is his inveterate, essential preliminary cowardice; not the conscience-made cowardice of Hamlet, but the prudential 'dare not' waiting on 'I would.' Fiend as she is, her compact demoniac eloquence is but the expression of the smothered thunder then filling the heart of the sullen, far-sighted man. There is a certain lurid glory in this undaunted challenge from womanhood to guarded royalty, — in this exaltation of

feminine weakness over masculine strength. Mingled with all its demonism there is still the human luxury of triumph. But what triumph for a brawny soldier, in his own castle, to slay a gray-haired guest asleep between two drugged and drunken grooms? What prostitution of the last remnant of manhood before that warrior dagger can be driven home to a dreaming, defenceless, loving heart?

The whole dialogue is unparalleled as an exhibition of human ferocity and exultant animal power. The damnable consistency of her guilt lends an intellectual majesty to her most horrible utterances. The unconquerable archangel of *Paradise Lost* is dwarfed side by side with this rapt high priestess of murder. 'She hath a demon; and that is the next thing to being full of the God.' But let the scene speak for itself: it cannot be read too closely or too often.

Macb. We will proceed no further in this business:

He hath honour'd me of late; and I
have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of
people,
Which would be worn now in their
newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

Lady M. Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it
slept since?
And wakes it new, to look so green and
pale
At what it did so freely? From this
time
Such I account thy love. Art thou
afeared
To be the same in thine own act and
valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou
have that
Which thou esteems't the ornament of
life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I
would,"
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

Macb. Prithee, peace:
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

Lady M. What heart was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you *were* a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you made them both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 't is to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

Macb. If we should fail?
Lady M. We fail!
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep
(Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only; when in swinish sleep
Their drenchèd natures lie as in a death,
What cannot *you and I* perform upon
The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?
Macb. Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. —

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

The opening of the Second Act resembles the opening of Hamlet, — the same muffled minor, the same terse picturesqueness, the same unearthly resonance.

SCENE I. — *Inverness. Court of* MACBETH'S *castle. Enter Banquo, preceded by Fleance with a torch.*

Ban. How goes the night, boy?
Fle. The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.
Ban. And she goes down at twelve.
Fle. I take 't, 't is later, sir.
Ban. Hold, take my sword: — there 's husbandry in heaven.
Their candles are all out: — take thee that, too. —
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,

And yet I would not sleep: — merciful
powers
Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that
nature
Gives way to in repose! — Give me my
sword. —
Who's there?

(*Enter* MACBETH *and a servant with a torch.*)

Banquo's whole demeanor indicates mistrust. He could scarcely have divined Macbeth's desperate purpose, but he plainly distrusts him. Something in his own bosom tells him the man is not to be trusted:

—— merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that
nature
Gives way to in repose!

If the "all hail" of the weird sisters is the temptation of a dream to him, the father of a line of kings, what must it not be to the darker nature of one who is first himself to wear the crown? The tempted but unseduced gentleman would

have watched all night but for the leaden summons of the banquet or the drugged possets of his hostess. He is sad, nervous, weighed down with a dark presentiment of woe, ill at ease about his own personal safety. The torchlight meeting of the two chieftains . . .

[Here the fragment ends.]

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